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Monster no Goshujin-sama

(Master of Monsters)

Arc 2: Those Who Lead Monsters

by Higure Minto

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Chapter 01: The New Monster of the Family

I suddenly woke up. It was still dark, about dawn.

In my hazy consciousness, I let out a shiver.

I felt an unusual chill.

"...Lily?"

The Lily that I usually hug in my sleep is not beside me.

No. That's wrong.

Lily is here.

Cushioning my sleeping body, she has been supporting me as a 'bed'.

It was just that she was not in her human form.

"Where are you...?"

I was still in a daze.

Lily had pointed it out before, but this sleep-related condition of mine can be said to be one of my weak spots.

My head was completely not working, even my thought processes were

working at less than one-tenth of its capacity.

The things that happened before I went to sleep, as well as the coherency of what had occurred until now, mean nothing to me right now.

For now, it was taking all my strength just to think about the fact that 'Lily isn't here', so I mustered my energy and called out.

And she responded.

There was a sensation of a jelly-like thing moving at my back.

From both my left and right sides, tentacles smoothly slid up and wrapped around my body.

If an unknowing person saw me now, he would have completely misread the situation as 'a pitiful victim who is on the verge of being preyed upon by an unknown animal'.

Of course, I did not panic.

That is because, the Slime that I am sprawled on, is a monster that is a part of my 'Family of Monsters'.

And I, despite being unqualified, lead them as the Master of Monsters.

The transparent tentacles that were wound around me took on the rough shape of an arm, rippled once, and slowly turned into the arms of a girl.

From the fingertips to the wrist. Then, the lower arm, elbow, upper arm,

and the shoulder, the smooth color of soft skin spread out.

While gazing at the scene, I felt my vision flicker.

Perhaps I was still in a sleepy daze. The resulting radiance of the transformation was very beautiful, and I became entranced by the transformation of a Slime turning into a girl.

Two soft and bouncy somethings could be felt through my jersey, pressed against my back.

Dokun, dokun—the audible rhythm of life could be heard.

I felt the sweet breath of a girl close to my ear.

All of those were products of mimicry.

Yet to me, all of them have the same meaning as the real thing, a proof of life.

"Good morning, Master."

What turned around to meet me eye to eye, was a girl that had her back half—from ear to lower body—still bonded in the state of a Slime.

"Aah. Lily, I..."

Just as I was about to say something, my lips were suddenly sealed.

"...Mm?"

My body was turned to the front, and I was given a kiss so passionate that it felt like it was engulfing me.

If I were to put it in other words, it could be said that she was 'devouring' me with greed.

Wiggling her tongue like a mollusk, she entangled it around mine as I was still half-asleep.

——Lily seems to like kissing.

That was something I understood from the night I bonded with her.

<TLN: Read: that hot and passionate night of activities - Blessersz>

I wonder if she has a fondness for it.

I pester her whenever possible.

Also, once she starts, she doesn't seem to stop.

That's fine. As a man, there's no reason for me to complain.

However, sometimes I become anxious... All that saliva that I've swallowed, was it perhaps from bodily fluids from Lily's slime form?

Well, saliva is a bodily fluid, but a Slime's bodily fluids are kinda... different in viscosity.

I like kisses, like them like them—love them very much! ...to an extent where it can be thought of as 'endearing', but if it was a type of

inclination like 'knowing the pleasure of becoming a part of your beloved', even if I admit to being her Master, I have no confidence in responding to that.

"——Pwhaah."

While I have been profoundly thinking of stuff like that, Lily seems to be satisfied.

After changing plenty of kisses, she released me.

By that time, I have woken up completely. ...I felt like holding my head. 'What are you trying to do early in the morning?' Because I was half-awake, I lost the self-control to ask that. However, that time has passed and won't come back.

Lily had a strange glint in her eyes for some reason, this presence feels dangerous.

I know from experience that she was classified as a 'carnivorous woman'.

It was necessary to change gears.

"...Morning, Lily."

"Mmm. Gochisousama."

<TLN: Gochisousama - An informal saying for 'thanks for the food' after meals. -Blesseser>

"Osomatsusamadeshita*. ...No. That's the reply for snacks."

<TLN: Similar to gochisousama, except that this is for snacks only. -

Blesseser>

"Ahaha. Good morning, Master."

Exchanging greetings again, I stood up from the bed that Lily has been serving as.

I lightly shake my head with the intention of shaking off the slightly pink atmosphere that she created. Because it was early in the morning, I put aside the arousing and other bad thoughts she invoked, and turned around to face her.

"By the way, how's the condition of your body?"

Today was the second day after the death match against the White Arachne.

We had been holing up in the Arachne's nest until now, resting our wounded bodies.

Lily and Rose had both received dire injuries.

Lily had to recuperate her seriously injured body that couldn't be treated even with her third-ranked recovery magic. Rose, on the other hand, had to remake her broken parts for her to move about properly.

This was also the reason why Lily didn't use the form of a girl while I was sleeping.

Even now, when I look closely, her smile is slightly lacking in her usual cheer.

As expected, even though her upper half was naked and her chest was

hidden, I don't feel lustful from looking at the face of Lily, who was in such a bad condition for the sake of changing her figure from a Slime to a human girl.

"Aha. It's still kinda painful."

"Then, continue sleeping."

Nodding her head of flaxen hair, Lily narrowed her eyes, seemingly in pleasure.

<TLN: Flaxen: pale yellowish-gray color - Blesserez>

"Mmm. I'll do that..."

Slithering her upper half body sank back into that of a Slime's.

Petting the flat and spacious spot where her head had sunk back into a Slime, I turned and left.

There was a blank face watching our exchange.

...It seems like we were seen.

"Morning, Rose."

"Good morning to you, Master."

The hardworking Rose greeted me with a quiet voice as she one-handedly worked with a utility knife that looked like the usual.

The reason why she lowered her voice was because Kato-san was still wrapped up and sleeping under the sheets.

As I closed the distance, Rose stood and greeted me.

"You're up quite early today."

"I was woken up. Then got up after that."

"Was it Anesama? It can't be helped. Since she wasn't pampered yesterday."

"Putting it that way, it's as if spoiling her is something natural..."

It was true that for the entirety of yesterday, Lily was unconscious as she was focused on recovering her body, so even if I wanted to, I could not have pampered her.

"Yesterday night, Anesama was bullied by Kato-san, you see. Even if she knows that she's in the wrong logically, emotionally, she most likely wanted to be pampered by Master."

"Because it was impossible yesterday, it became the first thing in the morning, huh. ...Come to think of it, I still haven't heard the details regarding what happened the day before yesterday when I was not around."

I thought that asking Rose what happened between Lily and Kato-san would be the most objective. This was the perfect time to ask, as Lily was unconscious and Kato-san was currently still in dreamland.

I spent about thirty minutes asking Rose about all the happenings during that short time when I was not around.

"It seems that we've troubled Kato-san quite a bit."

After hearing about the events, I unthinkingly let out a sigh.

Kato-san seems to have saved my hide this time round.

Even I, who was slow on the uptake, could vaguely guess at the amount of danger my Family was placed in. It was my fault that I did not prepare an effective plan for this incident. Even so, I still owe her one for taking care of my Family when I wasn't around—that was something that must be repaid.

I was frustrated that the only thing that I could do was ensuring her protection with those I trust.

Furthermore, I inquired Rose on the progress on her own body's condition.

"Regarding the parts of my body, I completed retrofitting them yesterday."

Just like she said, Rose's body no longer had any painful-looking cracks.

Her body looked different from when I first met her; the wooden texture no longer looks exposed, it became paler, and looks closer to a mannequin doll now.

I thought about the sword that has been hanging by my waist all this while.

Even though it had also been crafted out of wood, Lily had likened the metallic texture to 'Damascus Steel'. Even Rose's body was made by and rebuilt with her own hands. It wouldn't be strange even if the wooden

materials she used took on a number of unusual properties from her own magic.

"Because I also upgraded my arms, their strength has been increased somewhat. I believe that it will be of help to Master."

"I see. I'm looking forward to it."

"The problem are the weapons. The battle two days ago rendered several armors unusable. I would like to request about four days to fix all of them."

"Got it."

This wasn't a bad thing. Rose's hands have gotten better. By renewing the entire set of armors, it would lead to greatly increasing our battle strength.

However, if we do that, then Rose won't be able to travel for four days on end, huh.

Lily probably needs time to recuperate from her wounds as well.

That's not exactly an issue. They really have worked very hard and deserved some time to rest.

The problem, is with myself.

Yesterday, I was plagued with fatigue and phantom pains.

Even though they can be said to be non life-threatening, I did suffer some serious injuries. Thanks to the benefits of recovery magic, my wounds were healed, but the stamina that I lost couldn't be restored. That was the reason behind my lethargy, and I guess the phantom pains that I've been experiencing are due to the shock my frail, human body

received.

However, when I woke up today, my body had mostly recovered to its normal state.

With this, I should be able to move about well enough. Even though I could, the reason why I'm not working could be attributed to laziness.

"I have a request to ask of Rose."

"All that Master wishes for is top priority. Please speak of any request you have."

"There's no need for that much humility... Ah well."

I let out a wry smile as Rose bent down on a knee and bowed her head.

"My request is just that I want my equipment to take priority."

"That is, of course, possible. Those were my original intentions as well."

"How long would they take to be finished?"

"The production can be completed by noontime today."

"Really? I can start exploring the forest at noon then."

"Do you already intend to commence the search in the forest?"

<TLN: Referring to searching for more monsters for more Family Monsters -Blessers.>

I nodded in answer to the question which was asked with increasing surprise.

"Ah. It's because I can move about already."

"I do not mind, but Anesama can not move, as you can see. Shall I switch to working at the night instead? However, if I do so, the enhancements for the equipments will require more time."

"Nah. Rose should continue with what you've been doing. I now have another fighting force to rely on aside from Lily and Rose, right?"

Rose seems to have understood my implied meaning.

"Do you intend to search in the forest only accompanied by her?"

"Why, does Rose object to it?"

"Master is still in convalescence. I have humbly determined that Master should not be overexerting himself."

"Even without you worrying, I don't intend to do so. My body can really move about without problems already."

I tried twisting my body about—there don't seem to be any parts that are in pain.

There is no doubt that my body is in good health.

"Just... that certainly seems to be the case. It might be just as Rose said; it's not good to overstrain one's body while recovering."

Because of the White Arachne's assault, I've only made them worried. It can't be helped that they are feeling especially sensitive now.

I feel apologetic that they have to constantly worry about me. I should give way for now.

"I understand. Then, I'll maturely and properly rest my body for today

and watch my body's condition. The departure will be postponed to tomorrow morning. Will that be okay?"

"...Yes."

Rose seemed to have more to say, but backed down for my sake for now.

If I didn't agree to quietly do nothing for the whole of today, she would definitely not have remained silent and nag at me.

Thinking of that, I silently watched Rose as she worked but... Before long, Kato-san woke up, finished breakfast, and I became bored when it passed noon.

I wasn't aware of it until now but, I seem to have an existing obsessive mentality of 'needing to do something'.

The time I took for resting as a precaution, became painful for me instead.

" ... "

Especially after telling Rose that I will rest my body today, I cannot say that I am going out, nor can I practice my swings to train my body.

"Do you intend to go somewhere, Master?"

The moment I stood up, Rose questioned me with a sharp voice. Perhaps she was looking out for me on Lily's behalf as well.

"I'm just going out for some air."

"Is that so? Please go ahead then."

Perhaps realizing that I felt that I had too much time on my hands, Rose's thoughts of astoundment and resignation were transmitted to me through the path between us.

I hurriedly departed from that place.

* * *

Even though the Arachne's nest consisted of logs that were just stuck together with spider threads, it was in tatters after the battle two nights ago, and with just some slight reworking by Rose's hands, it became shockingly comfortable for living in.

It takes a lot of effort for humans to walk on it, but it's now on a level where you won't fall down from your shoes getting stuck.

I exited the Arachne's nest.

The moment I did so, a white figure came flying into my sight.

"Gerbera."

<TLN: Gerbera: A genus of plants in the daisy family, flower meanings: innocence and purity -Blesses>

「おう、主殿」

"Aye, Milord."

When I called out its name after leaving the Arachne's nest, the White Arachne——now called Gerbera, showed an embarrassed smile of a young girl.

'Gerbera' was given to her when she begged for a name the day after the mortal combat.

It was quite hard to come up with.

In the first place, I had already run out of stock of the name of flowers; in the end, Kato-san had to help come up with it.

——How does 'Gerbera' sound?

——It has also been called 'Spider Bloom' for the way it blooms.

——That's it. It's decided then.

Kato-san finally showed a meager but joyful expression, perhaps due to the curious act of coming up with a name for someone.

With that said, it still doesn't change the fact that I had hassled her again.

I was apologetic and thankful at the same time. If it wasn't for her, there might have been a serious possibility that the White Arachne's name might have become something like 'Tulip'.

Of course, there was no reason to obsess with picking out a floral name. In the first place, I didn't have the intention of choosing from the names of flowers when I picked 'Lily'.

However, even though it wasn't a necessity, there was sufficient reason to do so.

To be the only person without a floral name, that person who was named would hate it.

She dislikes being the only different one.

Notwithstanding that kind of encounter we had... ..No. It was because of that encounter that she values and holds her companions highly.

It's a good inclination. While thinking favorably of her attitude, I asked a question.

"Oh yeah, Gerbera. That thing I told you about earlier, is it ready?"

"Aye."

In reply to my question, Gerbera returned with a nod.

I had requested something of her.

"It hath just been completed. How doth it fare?"

What Gerbera took out was a white cloth that had a smooth sheen.

To be exact, it was a piece of clothing made from white cloth.

It is of a simple make that can be closed at the front.

This is a product made with spider threads, created by the special ability

of the Arachne.

Yesterday, I was only shown a little of it, but by just using a couple of wooden sticks, she showed that she was really good at weaving.

According to Mizushima Miho's memories from Lily, it seems to be something called a 'backstrap loom'. Gerbera has some tools that were of her own arrangements, but it's essentially the same thing.

For example, the reason why she, a monster, could clad the upper young girl half of her body in thin cloth, is thanks to this ability.

Of course, what I had requested was a tighter and sturdier version of this product.

That was obvious. That could only be something meant for a baby doll. Now isn't the place for enjoying such assortments. What I wanted was a more fitting sort of clothing.

I checked the clothes in my hands.

However, it seemed different from what I expected of spider threads. It wasn't sticky, and gave off a smooth, silk-like feeling when I touched it.

I heard some trivia in the past that spider threads had different properties from warp and woof. In regard to this cloth, it feels the same as the longitudinal and transverse ones; threads without adhesiveness.
<checked>

<TLN: Google 'warp and woof' to understand -Blessorz>

"How dost it fair? 'Tis a wonder, is it not?"

Perhaps proud of it, Gerbera stretched out her body.

Such things make her similar to Rose. She too, when she had made something herself and shown it to me, had seemed proudly happy.

In Gerbera's case, she did not have a calm personality like Rose, and simply hugged, or rather, forcefully embraced me.

More than that, it seems like she doesn't know how to maintain distance between herself and others. It's too close. It was so close that, if she wanted to, she could easily steal my lips.

"I also didn't think that it would turn out this well."

"Indeed, is it not so?"

"Yes. Looks like it. ...I know that, so don't stick so close."

I pushed her shoulder and opened up some distance between us.

My heart skipped a beat when my palm came in direct contact with the delicate girl, but I don't show it on my face.

...But Gerbera would come to know of it either way, so it doesn't really make a difference.

"So hurry up and wear it. How do I say it, your appearance is embarrassing."

It's too late to say this now, but Gerbera's appearance is quite provocative.

It has been bothering me for some time now, but the outerwear made

of thin cloth is practically see-through under the midday sun, barely hiding one's skin from view.

Also, speaking of this girl, she isn't even trying to cover her chest at all.

She looked so defenseless that a man without inhibitions might even forget that her lower half is that of a spider and attack her.

Well... In that case, he would have casually gotten the tables turned on him, and it would be all over though.

Even without attacking her, there is also the possibility of getting killed just upon meeting her.

I should be incredibly grateful to the heavens for letting such a powerful monster become my comrade.

"Hurry up, will you."

However, this and that are different.

Gerbera seemed like she still wanted to be praised more, but when I tell her off strongly, she unexpectedly did not resist; and obediently followed my instructions.

"Fine, fine. Doth not be angered, Milord. ...Strange. Was I mistaken that Milord was not displeased with the idea? But Milord hast been gazing at mine figure for quite a while."

"..."

It seemed that my self-control was still lacking.

If I'm allowed to make excuses for my actions; it wasn't on purpose.
It was done unconsciously.
Really.

No. In this situation, it's still bad even if it's unintentional.

...Could it be that I'm sexually frustrated?

I had been sleeping on the same bed with Lily... ...More like, I had been using her as a bed, and since the first night, I haven't done it with her.

It has been hard just to survive, and not to mention that I felt that it would be bad to surrender my body to such acts in this kind of situation.

Above all, Rose was awake and Kato-san was sleeping nearby. I couldn't be true to my desires in this open space where one can even freely run about.

...If that was what has caused sexual frustration ...I must be a bit more vigilant from now on.

...In one corner of my head, it wasn't as if I couldn't hear the whisper of 'It can't be helped since I'm a guy', but if I end up listening to the devil's murmurings, I'll end up just like a certain Kaga.

That's not good.

"I hath changed, Milord."

Recovering from my useless thoughts, I returned to what was in front of me. The figure of Gerbera stood: she wore the thin cloth she has been wearing on top of the translucent clothes she just showed me.

"..."

The chest area seems a little too open, but I'm not one to speak about girls' fashion. Before I came into this world, in modern Japan, I knew of girls the same age as me that wore even more extreme clothes during vacation.

And in actuality, they were very fitting.

With fantasy-like straight, long hair, unnaturally delicate facial features, and mysterious scarlet eyes, what's above Gerbera's waist is practically that of a fairy or an elf.

Because such a girl was wearing such fluttery clothes, it is impossible for it not to be fitting.

Now that her skin can no longer be seen directly, her devilish aura had thinned out, and honestly, she was very adorable.

"How is it, Milord? Is it fitting?"

"Ah. It's adorable."

"O-oh? A-adorable...?"

When I casually responded, Gerbera's blindingly white skin was dyed red immediately.

Since her skin is white, I can see the redness up to her chest as it stood out even more.

Even though she's such a beauty, she isn't accustomed to being praised. Her lips couldn't help but curl up in happiness. It must be because she had always been alone. If she was a normal girl, I would be worried about her getting cheated by bad guys.

As I was waiting for Gerbera to regain her composure, I started to open my mouth.

"It really is quite something. So, please continue make clothing for us."

By the way, I am currently wearing jerseys for my top and bottom.

It's easy to move around in, and we're not in a situation where we have to worry about fashion. You can tell what I'm mindful about just by looking at my face. That's another reason why I'm not concerned about this, but Lily only has a jersey to wear,; we simply have no other stock of clothes.

I would rather like to be spared from only having a set of clothes on my body. Also from a hygienic and mental aspect as well.

"I can look forward to its durability as well right?"

"Umu. Since my spider threads were used. It will neither be torn nor be easily pierced."

"That sounds reassuring."

"I'll let you behold one that shan't tear even in a Fire Fang's maw."

"I'm looking forward to it."

In that case, the insides of my body probably wouldn't hold out against the power of the jaws, but I won't say something that'll dampen her spirits. Besides, we'll proceed further into the forest, so being better equipped is obviously a good thing.

"Ah. That's right."

"Aye? Milord?"

"I feel bad for asking for another favor now, since I just requested one of you..."

"Take it not to heart. If I am able, I'll do anything for thee, Milord."

Gerbera showed an expression of joy while saying that.

For us——perhaps the fact that she could do something for the sake of the first comrades she gained caused her overjoyous atmosphere.

It is really a good indication.

She's hyped up about it. If she's like this, then it'll lessen the time needed for us to be familiar with each other.

"Would you like to enter the forest with me tomorrow?"

"Together, Milord? Certainly, if Milord desires, Milord need not go in person, but only command thine servant to retrieve it. Even if 'tis to gather the carcasses of four Fire Fangs, an easy feat it shall be."

"I don't need such bad tasting meat. ...It's not something like that; I need to be there in person. My [Monster Tame] ability requires me to be near monsters..."

As I filled Gerbera, who recently joined as a comrade, in on her lack of

knowledge, I finally felt something akin to a challenge for the first time since stepping into this world.

Everyone worked together to overcome a huge difficulty and a new fighting force was added.

Surely, from now on, everything will go well. That's what I believed.

Chapter 02: Suspicion and Trust

Dawn, a few days later.

"I am sorry to have hastened you."

"No worries..."

I received new equipment from Rose.

The usual chestplate, lower body protector, and a big shield.

Just, the shades are a bit darker, different than the ones before.

It's not at the level of the pseudo-damascus steel sword that Rose had produced but this seems to be stronger than the previous one as well, if everyone can be equipped with this our battle power can be increased by several times.

Rose had done a good job as usual.

I quickly finished the preparations to get ready.

"Alright. Preparations are finished. It's about time to go."

After I talked to Rose and Kato-san, I stroked the surface of the transparent jelly-like monster using my fingertip.

"Also, Lily. I'm heading out for a bit."

There was no answer.

" ... "

Lily shut down her consciousness in order to recover. It's akin to state of sleeping for humans; while doing that, she can't maintain her mimicry ability during then. She 'woke up' a few times, She woke up a few times like she did yesterday morning, but looking at her weakened state was a bit painful.

Being a Slime with vitality, there was no danger to her life, she only needs a few days to recover, but during that time, it's better to leave her as she is.

"Then, I'll leave things to you."

"Yes, Master."

"...Okay."

After I exchanged greetings, I moved to exit from the Arachne's nest.

"Master."

Just before leaving the nest, Rose, whom I had just exchanged farewells with, called out to me.

I looked back towards Rose.

Maybe there was something that I had forgotten.

"Master, are you really going?"

"That topic again?"

Since yesterday, Rose had been opposed to me going out surveying the forest.

It had only been three days since the mortal combat against the White Arachne.

Because of that event, her worry was still reasonable.

It's just, it seems her concern was a bit excessive.

"We have talked about this many times, didn't we? I have completely recovered. Don't worry about me. I won't suddenly fall over."

"I am aware of that, but..."

Rose could be seen stuttering on her words.

"What about other matters? Yes, for example, there is an issue regarding safety, is there not?"

"You mean, like, if this Arachne's nest is safe?"

Safety issues... I see, there was also such a reason to oppose this, huh.

However, I have also thought about it.

"It's alright. If it comes to that, it's fine to wake Lily up. The way you two are now, whatever monster that comes, it wouldn't take long for you guys to handle them.

Originally, only Lily and Rose had combat capabilities.

When we were living in the cave before, Lily went out in order to secure food and Rose was the only one as my escort. Compared to that, right now both Lily and Rose are fully equipped to guard the nest.

Lily isn't in good condition currently, but it isn't at a level where she cannot handle one or two fights.

"Besides, in the first place, wasn't it said that monsters generally don't approach this Arachne's nest?"

It's rare for monsters to approach the nest of the White Arachne, who is a 'High Monster'. Actually, those monsters that did have been completely eliminated throughout the long years.

In other words, it was the mechanism of selection in evolution.

"I do not mind whatever that may befall us."

Rose insisted strongly.

"What I am worried about is Master."

"...It's not something to be worried about. My escort is that White

Arachne, a 'High Monster'. There aren't many monsters who can stand against her."

While conversing, I suddenly became suspicious.

Despite all that, the thought that Rose was worrying too much came to me.

In the first place, Rose opposing my policy was unusual. If I were to say it, she's the type to suppress her own feelings and silently follow the orders given.

And yet, why was she...

...No, rather...

Was it possible that Rose's true intention was about 'this'?

"Why are you so against me going to the forest? Rose, are you perhaps hiding something?"

"...That is."

"This is you we're talking about. You're probably thinking along the lines of 'It's because I didn't comply with your will', right? Stop thinking about weird things. If you are not satisfied with something, just say so. Since you're part of my 'Family of Monsters', you're a precious comrade."

Even after I prompted her, she was still at a loss.

Even so, I patiently waited for her. She suddenly knelt down and lowered her head.

"I am very sorry, Master."

"So, what's wrong?"

"I already know of Master's feelings towards us, your 'Family of Monsters'. I am thankful for that, and have no intentions of ignoring it."

With her head lowered, she started voicing out what was inside her heart.

At the same time, the apologetic feelings within her heart... As well as something like a sense of shame from her, flowed to me through the path.

But... against what?

The question that I held was answered as Rose continued.

"However, for me... I absolutely cannot trust that Gerbera like Anesama did."

"...What did you say?"

For me, this was an unexpected confession.

While I said nothing, Rose continued to speak.

"Could you at least wait until either Anesama or me can freely move?"

To summarize, the thing that she wanted to say was, 'Because Gerbera

can not be trusted, it should be herself or Lily who becomes the escort.'

I felt somewhat dizzy.

It was because I understand just how serious Rose was.

"So, that's the true reason why you are against me going into the forest?"

"I am truly sorry."

Rose bowed more deeply as I inquired of her.

"You are not going to forgive her?"

"...No."

"I see."

Ah, damn it.

This happened because of my mistake.

Rather, I should have predicted this thing.

I had completely forgotten that possibility after Lily had readily accepted it.

Rose was different from Lily.

The role that she took was to guarantee the safety of my well being, acting as my guardian.

She wouldn't tolerate it, if I, as her Master, were to be hurt.

That was her principle.

—I exist in order to protect Master. For that purpose, I don't mind if this body has to turn into chips of wood.

Those were the words which Rose had told me.

Her very reason to exist is to protect me.

It must have been natural for her to not forgive Gerbera, who had hurt me. Rather, in regards to that matter, I must be the one to conform to it instead.

"I am truly sorry."

"You don't have to apologize again and again. There's nothing we can do about that feeling of not wanting to forgive her..."

Even if I'm told to forgive the students who bullied me back in the 'Colony', it's impossible.

If I think about it again... They must have fallen into a panic. It was a state of emergency. Those guys were usually good people. They were innocent. It was because of the bad situation... I've thought about that possibility.

It's merely thinking about it.

But I really don't believe in those thoughts at all.

Even if all of them died, I would not even feel a shred of pity towards them; to me, they would have been nothing more than pile of dead bodies.

There is a part that can never be comprehended with reason that exists within the thing that is called the 'human heart'.

Lily on the other hand, had already forgiven Gerbera. Even so, it's not that Rose was a small-minded person compared to her.

Lily prioritized my feelings, while Rose, who was practical, focused on the safety of my well-being.

These were the girls' characters, it couldn't be denied that this was the result of their personality. At least, I wouldn't completely deny it.

In addition to that... Frankly said, this incident was all Gerbera's fault.

It's the truth that the White Arachne, the embodiment of violence itself, had injured us.

After being reformed, her spiderly nature still had not changed.

You can't cover up what you've done in the first place.

No matter how much you regretted it, the past can't be changed.

Of course, I do believe in Gerbera.

I want the Family to believe in her.

However, it's wrong for me to order Rose to get friendly to Gerbera, right? That's not a true friendship built on trust. If it's like that, the relationship between the two would be totally different from what I wished.

From now on, Gerbera must win back the trust that she had lost from her first meeting.

However, this is not supposed to be something that needs to be worried about as much as it is.

Let's build trust steadily.

Compared to the normal way of building a relationship between humans, what we have between us here is unconventional instead.

Disregarding myself... The incident where Lily had readily agreed and accepted the once-hostile White Arachne, for example, was far from the norm.

—Winning Rose's trust.

The quickest way to do that is by 'showing Rose my usefulness', or something like that.

Using that means would produce result; as such, asking Gerbera to go out to the forest as my escort was the right thing to do.

What Gerbera needs right now, are results to prove her trustability.

If there are results, Rose will eventually recognize her efforts. Fortunately, Rose thinks rationally. If she believes that Gerbera has already reflected on her behaviour, it shouldn't be that hard.

Besides, the current situation was very harsh to Rose.

Even Rose didn't want to doubt Gerbera if possible, as she was also a part of the Family.

If it wasn't not like that, then I wouldn't have received feelings of 'shame' from Rose's confession.

Because both of them want to meet the other halfway, they'll be alright.

As long as we live, there's no such thing as not having problems at all. We have to settle even the small problems one by one.

Isn't it obvious that it's my job, as the girls' Master, to help them?

After I finished my conversation with Rose, I went out of the Arachne's nest.

Gerbera had been waiting there.

She was sitting with her spider legs bent while looking up at the sky absent-mindedly.

The talk with Rose had taken some time. I had seemingly made her wait in vain. I have done a bad thing.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting."

"Nay, I have not waited."

Gerbera lowered her line of sight that was directed to the sky and showed a stiff expression.

I leaned my head to the side.

"Did something happened?"

"U-umu. What wert thee saying?"

Gerbera immediately got up and turned her back to face me.

"Look. If we do not make haste, the day shall soon end. I wish to be home ere the sun sets,"

Her spoken words made her more suspicious.

I set out from the Arachne's nest while feeling a bit of suspicion.

* * *

We encountered an insect-type monster called Stub Beetle in the forest where we were living.

Stub Beetles could be as big as seventy centimeters. At a glance, they appear to be giant rhinoceros beetles.

Their bodies are covered with a bulky outer shell, the robustness of which is probably one of the top in this forest.

The cone-shaped horn which looks like a lance doesn't seem easily broken by small impacts.

Its specialty is launching a charging attack from mid-air.

This is a simple yet powerful attack. Previously, in the Colony, there was one victim who fell due of it.

The Stub Beetle that we encountered, seems to be more vigilant than the previous one. The moment we heard something flying, it had already danced around in the high sky.

By this point of time, there's no possibility that it is a part of my 'Family of Monsters'.

Besides the Stub Beetle clearly showing its hostility towards us, above all, the absence of feeling any path connecting us is proof.

The Stub Beetle aimed at me.

From the height of a few meters, its speed changed and its sturdy outer shell turned into a bullet-like weapon.

Even if I were to avoid this living bullet, the Stub Beetle, which is in our line of sight, it would just turn its aim from above. At this rate, it would shoot through me and it was possible that my upper body may be separated from my lower body.

"Entrust it to me."

The Stub Beetle was flying with a speed that can't be followed by the eyes but Gerbera, who was beside me, threw out her thread to change its course.

Not minding the thread that hit and stuck to it, the giant rhinoceros beetle whom had originally aimed at me, tried to rush at me.

But Gerbera didn't stop at that.

"Hrgh."

Planting her eight legs on the ground firmly, she pulled the thread that looked thin at the first glance and the supposedly power-type monster, the Stub Beetle, instantly lost its balance.

Its course deviated, losing control and crashed mid-flight.

The round body of the Stub Beetle was thrust at Gerbera as it bounced randomly along the way after being forcefully pulled at.

"This shall be thine end."

Gerbera struck out one of her spider's legs and crushed it instantly.

Like an expert spear fighter, the robust shell of the Stub Beetle was pierced through and sewed to the ground.

The Stub Beetle's legs trembled and then became silent.

"It ended... huh."

"Indeed."

After carefully confirming it, I let out the breath that I had been holding.

I know Gerbera's true power but, I'm still nervous when I'm in a real battle.

I still can't get accustomed in life-and-death struggles.

"Would not this be a most wondrous time for a short rest, Milord?"

My mental fatigue might have been shown on my face. Gerbera offered it with a thoughtful expression.

"I think so."

I gratefully accepted Gerbera's offer.

I sat down on the spot.

I drank some water from the wooden container that we brought, and let out a small sigh. Not just mentally, but I was also physically fatigued.

Without even noticing it myself, I had probably overstressed my mind. I should take short breaks from now on.

Then, while I was checking my condition, Gerbera called out to me.

"Milord."

"Yes?"

"I hath finished 'packaging'."

"That was fast."

On Gerbera's hand, who was talking to me, was the Stub Beetle's carcass wrapped in spider's thread.

The 'packaging' that she mentioned seems to mean exactly that. Convenient to be carried around and ensuring that the contents will not be 'spilled out' in any way, the remains of the monster was rolled up in the spider's thread.

Now then. the reason why she is purposely bringing back the remains of a monster, is that it is a souvenir for Lily who is now resting in the nest.

She has a mimicry ability which allows her to change into the prey she consumes.

In other words, if she can devour monsters that we have never met, it can be turned into her combat potential.

This isn't today's purpose, but it's still a bonus achievement.

Not bad. Now then, If we are able to bring back a new member for the 'Family', it'll be a great thing.

"Alright, let's head out then."

"Milord, please hold."

When I stood up energetically, Gerbera let out a reproach towards me.

"Thee wert only just seated. Wherefore do thee not rest some more, for Milord doest not have much endurance."

"...Well, if you compare me with you guys, monsters, then I guess I am really weak."

As a man, I felt kind of hurt being talked like I have a weak constitution, but the one who said it was the White Arachne. From her point of view, it isn't weird even if she sees me as being weaker than a baby.

"I understand. I will rest some more."

"Umu."

I sat down again on the spot with crossed legs.

Nodding as if she is satisfied seeing that, Gerbera folded her eight legs and sat down.

About three meters from me.

"..."

"...Aren't you too far away?"

There isn't supposed to be a feeling of distance when there's only two

of us, right?

Not to mention that it was hard to talk like this.

It suspiciously feels like the distance one takes when they hated the other person.

"F-forsooth?"

Gerbera awkwardly moved her gaze away.

She's frankly being suspicious.

I can't help but think that something has happened.

"Gerbera?"

When I called out her name, her shoulder flinched in response.

"Wh-what is it?"

"..."

"Uuu..."

I continued staring at her until her upper body drooped, just like a white lily wilting.

Looks like she got the idea. Being honest is a good thing.

"What's wrong?"

After I asked, she opened her mouth timidly.

"...Art thee fine with this, Milord?"

"What's this about?"

As I expressed my non-understanding, she continued with an awkward tone.

"I... Just the other night, I hadst attacked thee, Milord. Art not thee slightly careless by being alone with me?"

If I could sum it up in one word, she had a demeanor that seemed as though she was going to disappear from this very place.

"Gerbera, you..."

Then, a thought came to me.

"You overheard my conversation with Rose?"

"Wh-what art thee speaking of!?"

The pitch of her voice increased and the gaze of her scarlet eyes kept swimming around.

No matter what, isn't she too panicked?

Acting like this isn't any different from her admitting it herself.

"You heard us, didn't you?"

I let out a sigh and walked towards her, who was averting her gaze.

She flinched her shoulder but did not try to run away.

She only looked down as if giving up.

"That's why you are acting strange."

"...Umu."

Rose was against me going exploring with Gerbera to the forest.

Gerbera overheard that and knows that Rose is suspicious of her, and so she decided to keep her distance with me.

The moment we went out into the forest with only the two of us, there was no longer any meaning in keeping some sort of distance between us... No. There's nothing else to say. I knew that she was clumsy. If I had known that, I would not have committed a failure like the one that night.

The problem is that Gerbera took it very heavily.

The reason why she was so down was probably because she had already been blaming herself inside.

After that one time when she was our enemy, it seems that she, who we call Gerbera now, felt like she owed a large debt to us.

After doing a bit of thinking, I asked.

"Insecure, huh? What? Are you going to hurt us again, Gerbera?"

"Fie! Fie upon that! I am truly grateful to ye, Milord!"

After she denied my words desperately, Gerbera realized something, dropped her legs and her shoulder on the spot.

"However, I, myself hath thought the same thoughts as what Lady Rose hadst spoken of, for she hast a point."

Even though she was a gorgeous beauty, that figure that shrunk into itself in depression, only looks like a large flower that has wilted and closed.

"I am dangerous, Milord. I may harm thee and the others again. 'Tis a fact..."

This seems to be quite a serious wound.

I confirmed it and furrowed my eyebrows internally.

We are a team of few people.

And so, we can't afford not to combine our power together in order to survive in this world.

If one feels too indebted to the others, it will probably create a discord.

It is my job as their Master to take care of the Family.

In addition to that, as I was the one who took her in as an ally, I have to take care of her properly.

Well half of it is my official stance. But my true intention is to not let her be left alone while feeling down.

But, how do I cheer her up?

Gerbera, with her head down, opened her mouth while I was thinking in front of her.

"Milord and the others have accepted me. I desire to present mine usefulness to Milord and the others. This be my true intention."

She clasped her hands together and looked up towards me with her scarlet eyes that were slightly averted.

"H-however, the fact that I have just been born cannot be changed. Even now, I still desire to monopolize thee and capture thee. ...Nay. Moreso than when we met yesterday, I feel that this sensation in my heart hath been ever growing."

Saying that, transparent smoldering affection can be seen in her scarlet eyes that were constantly sneaking glances at me.

"Thou hast forgiven me, but I may wound ye again eventually. It terrifies me that it may happen again."

Gerbera, the White Arachne, is a spider.

It was her natural instincts to catch her prey and tie them up.

Thinking of wanting to do it is natural for her, above she being herself, this is something that isn't something that can be changed.

...Although.

Even if you think so, whether do you really put it in action, the real ones may not be the same.

I think that way, and I believe so.

"Calm down, Gerbera."

In the end, I told her my opinion honestly.

"You won't hurt me... No, you won't hurt us ever again."

Besides, we are connected through the path between us. There is a high possibility of seeing through any deception or lies. That's why, it's best to convey feelings directly.

That's what I have determined.

"Milord, why dost thee think so?"

The things that I had said seems unexpected to her. Gerbera's lower body that is of a spider made a clicking sounds as she lifted her body.

"What Lady Rose hath said is correct. Even I, myself, cannot believeth in mine own self. But wherefore doth Milord believest so?"

"Why, huh... That is, it's because I saw your figure that night."

That night, Gerbera should have visualized how she would spent her life alone after that.

Just in the short time that we've met, the number of times that she was shaken by loneliness was several times that of what she has ever felt since she was alive.

I understand, because I had the same experience as well.

That's why I believe so.

If that has been the most painful feeling she had ever felt, she would be fine, is what I thought.

"You said, 'You're scared that you will hurt us', right? If you feel that way, then you'll be alright. You'll not betray our trust. Well, isn't that so? Just by having the fear of hurting us in the future, it already means that you earnestly care about us."

That's why there's nothing to be worried about at all.

There isn't any chance of Gerbera losing herself to her desires and hurting us.

There's something more important than that for her.

"I believe in you."

I held Gerbera's hand of the girl that drooped in front of the spider's body. It'll be good to show her my trust here. It'll be great if it becomes

can strengthen her.

"That's why, you should believe in yourself more."

"Milord..."

Gerbera looked at me motionlessly.

Or so I thought, but she suddenly lowered her face.

My hand was shaken off, and I stiffened in surprise.

"Ge-Gerbera?"

"Ah, Milord..."

A voice that sounded like a moan.

Gerbera hit her face with both her hands and lowered her head, as if trying to use her long hair to hide it

But, there's pretty much no point in hiding her face. Her ears that are peeking out from the mess of hair, are bright red, and her bare nape that was revealed as she looked downwards was dyed vermillion.

"Gerbera? You, what hap-..."

"Ah, Milord. I understand. I now know truly well that thee hast faith in me, as a member of the 'Family', from the bottom of thine heart."

Gerbera raised one of her hands, and stopped the words of I, who was worrying about her.

"That's why, let us leave it at that."

Gerbera confessed with a low voice to the confused me.

"...I may not be able to contain myself any longer."

"I see."

She was convinced.

From just now, I've been thinking that the spider legs have been noisily, making clinking sounds.

She had managed to endure it somehow.

Keeping one's promise is good. At this rate, her self-control would not be in vain.

I waited patiently until she had calmed down.

"...I apologize to hath made thee wait, Milord."

Finally, Gerbera lifted her reddened face up.

It wasn't a gloomy face, which then made me feel relieved.

"At any rate. I know now that Milord hast faith in me."

"It's not only me, Lily, too is the same."

"Indeed. But Lady Rose hast not."

"Well, it seems like that but..."

"Oh, Milord. Whatever shall I do?"

It isn't just a simple grieving.

The words that came out of Gerbera's mouth displayed her resolve on how to handle the situation now.

"Gerbera, do you want earn Rose's trust?"

"Of course."

"I see."

I unconsciously patted Gerbera's silver head, happy with that unhesitating reply.

"Then, you'll have to put effort into it for that."

"Aye..."

Showing a very happy face, Gerbera's white cheeks were dyed vermillion.

"If you really want to earn someone's trust, you must build it up from the bottom."

"Yes. That seemeth so."

Gerbera nodded with a slightly reddened face.

"We have to firstly complete this exploration successfully. Aye, I understand. I shall use all that is in my power to aid Milord."

"Right. I'm counting on you."

The expression on Gerbera's face is no longer faint.

It seems that her worries have been swept clean from her heart. A smile naturally floated across my lips knowing that.

"Well then, this time, let's go."

"Aye. Leave thy safeness during the journey to me."

With our steps lightened, we resumed the exploration.

Chapter 03: The Deep Hole Inside the Heart

The forest is overflowing with danger.

All the more so for places that we've never been to.

There are a lot of things to be careful about, even when just moving through. It must not be forgotten that this place is not an area for humans.

...That is something that I should've understood, but it's human nature to want no mistakes.

"Uoo!?"

The foot I stepped forward with slipped.

Probably because of the fatigue, my view was blurred, and the sole of my foot lost its grip due to the thickly grown grass.

At that moment, I lost my balance.

The hand that I hurriedly stretched out towards a tree branch missed by just a little, and I ungracefully fell down flat—or perhaps I should say that I began to fall down flat?

"It is dangerous. Prithee be cautious Milord."

"...My bad."

Gerbera immediately turned and caught me in her arms as I almost toppled over.

While remaining vigilant of the surroundings, she also seems to have been looking out for me. What a quick response.

As a result, the back of my head is half-buried within her bountiful breasts, but Gerbera doesn't seem to mind it. Her nice upside down face looked at me with worry.

"Art thou unharmed?"

"I have caused you trouble."

"Such events art not particularly bothersome at all."

Saying so, Gerbera checked that my feet were firmly on the ground.

" ... "

After pushing my head further into her chest and clutching it tightly to hug it, she took her hands away and released me.

" ... "

"W-what?"

I had turned around, and when I looked at her with reproachful eyes, Gerbera spoke with a high-pitched voice.

Her spider feet were making clinking *kichi kichi* noises. Evidently, this seems to be her habit.

"I-I pondered not any such acts like taking advantage of thee at all, for thy knowing."

"There's such a saying as 'letting the cat out of the bag', do you know its meaning?"

"S-somewhat."

"...Well, whatever."

It wouldn't help anything even if I blamed her, so I wrapped up the topic and resumed the search.

With a relieved look, Gerbera starts progressing into the forest as well.

This time around, I'll be careful while walking in the forest. I walked while muttering that.

"This is... troubling."

It's embarrassing to think about something like this, but Gerbera seems to harbor a clear affection towards me.

I'm not so thick-headed that I don't notice her feelings towards me after it has been openly shown to that extent.

And yet if it was my usual self, I might have doubted myself, questioned

whether I was simply being conceited in thinking her affections were intended for me, but....

I'm not particularly the type that's popular among the opposite sex.

My face isn't one that would be called ugly, but it's not the type that would be called good-looking either. I daresay that it's a face that gives off a diligent-esque impression—one with purely mediocre features.

I am aware that it's one of a man that's boring to be and talk with.

A man like me couldn't possibly attract an attractive person of the opposite sex so easily.

If the other party hadn't been Gerbera, there was a high possibility that I would have thought so.

But Gerbera's honest behaviour didn't allow me to 'escape' like that.

I was honestly happy to be the target of such clear affection.

I have no idea how a normal guy would feel about a girl with the bottom-half of a spider liking him...

Would he feel happy?

Would he not even feel disgusted?

From the viewpoint of those humans, I'm probably a mere deviant.

So what if that's the case?

After all that's happened, I have no intention of being bothered by

things like others' opinions.

I like her as a companion would.

Even if that were to progress into a relationship between a man and a woman, there was not that much of a psychological opposition towards it.

However, I have already accepted Lily's affection with my body.

As a man born and raised in Japan with normal sensibilities, I happen to have the feeling that a man should only love one woman in his life.

As a man, I can't respond to Gerbera's affections.

According to my values, that would be a dishonest course of action, a betrayal that should not occur.

That's what I think. ...At the very least, I would've stopped thinking further if it was a human girl.

However, at the same time, I can't help but be aware of the fact that this isn't modern Japan, and that I'm in an alternate world.

I am the Master of these girls, this Family of Monsters.

I know that these girls think of me as a special existence, just as they are special to me.

That's what I was able to learn—almost too well—on the night we overcame life and death.

The relationship between the girls and I is the kind that does not exist in the previous world.

Of course, I should not bring over values from those days, it's clear that

it was impossible to do so.

I must thoroughly reconsider this from scratch.

Regarding my relationship with the girls...

...and about Gerbera and Rose's relationship, there are so many things to consider that I feel like I'm going to get a headache..

However, this is something related to the girls, who are important to me. I must think it over seriously—no, I want to think it over seriously.

Should I be happy about being able to afford the luxury of worrying over things like this?

"Wherefore art thee troubled?"

Gerbera turned around; she seems to have heard my monologue.

There's no way that I can possibly answer her honestly and tell her that I'm worrying about my relationship with her from now on. I smiled vaguely.

"I was thinking that the search for monsters that can become a part of my Family doesn't seem to be going well."

It was a line I said to dodge the question, but that in itself was actually a troubling situation.

It has already been three days since the two of us started searching.

During these three days, we couldn't find any new monsters for the Family, despite bravely searching.

It's not as if we didn't gain anything at all.

There was something called 'Rifle Vine' back at the Colony placed on Gerbera's lower-half, the spider part of her plump abdomen, that we're bringing back. This is a monster that takes on the appearance of vine-type vegetation entwined around trees, and fires out seeds from a lily-like flower as if they were buckshot.

This will further increase Lily's strength if given to her.

Also, it may be insignificant at this stage, but every time Gerbera defeats a monster, she accumulates magical power. That's definitely not something meaningless.

The exploration itself is smooth.

However, it doesn't have the 'result' that I'm wishing for.

In the first place, why did I think to set out on a search as soon as I could?

That's partly because I couldn't stand spending time not doing anything, but more importantly, it's largely because our situation has changed.

Although the fight with the White Arachne was fierce, we overcame the crisis by combining our strengths, and as a result, we were able to gain a strong ally.

It's fair to say that the situation that we were placed in had, with that

night as the turning point, changed greatly.

There's even no need to compare it with what's happened so far; the future is bright.

The White Arachne, now named Gerbera, is one of the strongest monsters in this forest. The fact that there aren't many monsters that can go head to head with her, is conversely demonstrated by Lily and Rose's desperate fight.

Even by just being unafraid of the threat of normal monsters, our freedom of movement dramatically increases.

In addition to that, because 'Rare Monsters' and above are the targets for my cheat ability, they aren't a threat.

I daresay that in regards to 'High Monsters' like Gerbera, there may be dangers that accompany coming into contact with them as there were when we encountered Gerbera... but we aspired to come into contact with them, and it doesn't seem like they're something that can be stumbled upon.

In the interest of safety, up until now we had no choice but to act with prudence, but that's no longer the case. For the sake of gathering more members for the Family, we can now take even more audacious actions.

For example, the present situation of searching the forest with just Gerbera accompanying me, is one of those more audacious actions.

Even in the situation where Lily isn't able to move, I'm able to continue the search.

However, not having any results to go with that, is unfortunate.

"This is a little... We should change our method after all."

Not having any luck with our search is simply because my way of doing it is bad.

Even with our current method of searching, from a time efficiency viewpoint, it's by no means wrong.

What's wrong is that there is no change from before.

In order to raise its efficacy, we needed to choose a more efficient method.

First is the need to change the search area.

The cause of the search not turning out well is, above all, related to the encounters with monsters: largely because we couldn't manage to get enough monster encounters to be efficient.

Eight within three days.

Within this short period of time, it's by no means a bad number, but like this, it can't be helped that there were no monsters that seemed like they could become part of my Family of Monsters.

In order to get a large number, we needed to travel a slightly longer distance.

The area in this vicinity is still affected by the hunt that the Scouting Corps conducted. If we go further away, we should be able to encounter more monsters.

"Milord?"

"..."

I had fallen silent and was staring at Gerbera, who was gazing questioningly at me.

Also, for the sake of getting Rose to trust her, we must get some results.

"There's something I want to tell you, Gerbera..."

I renewed my determination, and facing the two red pupils fixed on me, I began to talk.

* * *

After I found an opening in the forest and sat down there, Gerbera made a meek face and asked for my thoughts.

"So to say, Milord would desire me to taketh thee yonder?"

"Well, I don't mind if you understand it in such a manner. But if there's a place where there are loads of monsters, that's fine as well."

Gerbera's eyebrows furrowed.

"Umu. I see. If it is so, then I do know of such a place."

"Really? It would be great if we can make it there within a day's trip if

possible.”

If we can't make it within a day's trip, there was a possibility that Rose would be against it.

“Umu. It is one of many springs hither forth, but many creatures drink from them, so it shant be difficult to encounter monsters.”

“Oh. That's good.”

I wanted such information like that.

“Alright. Shall we try going there today?”

“Understood. Allow me.”

Perhaps happy to be of help, Gerbera's voice was lively.

“Well then, let's work out the details. Sorry, but please take part in the discussion.”

“T-thee speakest of me?”

However, the moment I proposed a discussion, Gerbera faltered.

“Is it troublesome?”

“N-nay. Not at all.”

Gerbera waved her hands about in front of her chest in a panic.

"My thoughts led me to believe that others were more apt."

"Even if I'm told that..."

I scratched my head.

"Gerbera is the only one here, right?"

"U-umu you speak truth but... would Milord be willing if we were to return for a short while today?"

"Hmm. Even if you say that..."

"What?"

"Take Lily for example: honestly, I don't really want to place a burden on her."

I want to let her focus on recuperating. It seems that she'll have soon recovered enough to move around without any issues, but nevertheless, I don't really want to trouble her with our problems.

"I can't tell Rose. You should know that."

"Hum. That is true."

Gerbera showed a slightly crestfallen look. Even she knows that if we discussed it with Rose, there was a high possibility of it being rejected.

"Yet, is it not still improper for me? I am but a damsel that has relied on brute strength to solve all issues hitherto. Nor am I the sharpest."

"But I don't think so."

Having conversed with Gerbera for the past few days now, I don't think she's worse than the other Monsters of the Family at using her head. She is simply young at heart and awkward; moreover, it's just that our initial meeting went sour—by no means does it mean that she is a stupid person.

However, it appears that she herself does not think so.

"Is there not another to discuss with possibly? Such as... Ah, there is Kato; how about that terrifying young lady?"

Gerbera's evaluation of Kato-san has become quite terrible.

It's also strange that Gerbera—who is overwhelmingly strong even amongst my travelling companions—is afraid of Kato-san, who is the weakest in strength. That just goes to show the extent to which Kato-san had dominated the argument that night.

"That young lady is of merit. Rather than one such as I, she would be of more worth in such a discussion."

Certainly, if I discussed this with Kato-san, there's a possibility that she would be able to give suggestions of some sort.

She just has something that makes a person have expectations of her. By all rights, Gerbera's suggestion wasn't that bad.

However, I couldn't help but shake my head from side to side.

"What I'll discuss with Kato-san is, how do I put it... something different."

"How doth it differ?"

"Well..."

When faced with this question, I was stumped.

That's because, if she has been associating with Lily and Rose so far, she would have understood what I wanted her to.

"Kato-san isn't a part of the Family. She's human."

"Is being human so terrible?"

Gerbera's expression turned more and more bewildered.

As if my words wouldn't get through in any way.

"If she is human, doth that mean that she is not our companion? However, the night that I committed my transgressions, she aided Milord, together with Lady Lily and Lady Rose."

"That's..."

I tried to refute Gerbera's point, but I couldn't find the words.

Because what Gerbera said was right.

Kato-san is a human, but she had fought for my sake.

I don't mean that she had held a weapon in her hands, but she, in her

own way, put her life on the line for me. She had bet her life to save mine.

That's why... No. Wait. The conversation has turned in a weird direction.

I have a bad feeling about this. I don't know what's bad about it, but to me, this conversation is... How do I say it... inconvenient.

It had that sort of feeling to it.

Without noticing my consternation, Gerbera continued to enquire.

"Surely, she is one of Milord's companions - that was my thought. However, if that is not the case, then what is Lady Kato's relationship with Milord? "

Hearing Gerbera's question, I suddenly recalled Kato-san's reserved smile..

——"It's good that you're alright, senpai."

——"Yes. Towards senpai, who was the Master, being believed in, trusted in, relied on and loved by... Those are things that bring happiness, aren't they?"

——"That's it! That's decided then."

" ... "

Actually, when did I start being concerned about Kato-san?

I got the feeling that my impression of that person—no, Kato-san—had

changed that night.

By speaking to her, most of the uneasiness I felt about her no longer exists—but if I told her that, would it be conveyed instead?

I had also considered whether it was because she had mentally recovered, but something about that also doesn't sound right.

She has indeed spoken a lot more than in the past, and as a result, the number of times that her smiles were shown has increased.

This is cannot be anything but change.

However, it isn't something that can be called dramatic.

It's not as if Kato-san's basic expressions are lively even now; if anything, her expressionless and gloomy impression hasn't changed. She continues to have glazed eyes, and her occasional smiles are merely her lips being slightly upturned; it somehow feels like there's a shadow over her.

She didn't really change much from before.

But my eyes can see that something is different from before.

...No, Wait.

Isn't this that?

Having thought that far, I suddenly noticed my misunderstanding.

Kato-san herself 'has not changed at all'. Despite this, she 'seems different'.

So that means it's more natural to think that 'my perspective has changed' instead, doesn't it?

That night, when I was captured by the White Arachne, Kato-san exposed herself to danger to save me.

I was helped by her.

That was why my perspective of her had changed slightly. Isn't it that sort of thing?

Thinking back on it, I've always been suspicious of Kato-san ever since I met her.

I had always looked at her from this perspective: 'She'll surely betray us.'

If you were to look through distorted lens, then naturally, any scenery you see through it will seem distorted.

Now, after all that has happened, I can finally look at her without any bias.

It's probably something like that.

Now that I've noticed it, I wonder what should I do now?

Just now, Gerbera asked what Kato-san was to me.

To me, she's my ward.

Nothing more, nothing less.

Thinking that, I have never built a relationship with her until now.

But now, however...

Could it be that I am—for the first time—at the starting point for me to build a relationship with her?

If that's the case...

She even put her life on the line in order to save me; shouldn't I at least return her trust?

"..."

I was nearly killed by my acquaintances, my classmates, at the Colony in the past.

Humans are disgusting.

You never know when they will betray you. That has been, and still is, a core part of my unwavering values.

But as far as Kato-san is concerned, the possibility of her betraying us is probably low.

Such a thing shouldn't be possible for that sort of human who went as far as betting their own life to save me.

Thinking about it logically, it doesn't seem like I've thought much about it at all.

Even theoretically speaking, it's strange for me to be doubting her.

Above all, my senses are telling me that it's okay to trust her.

That's why... once again... it might be okay to try and trust her—only her.

But it might be too late.

This time for sure, I will trust her...

Yes. Trust...

"Urg..."

Nausea abruptly surged up, and I promptly moved away from there.

"Ah, Milord!?"

I could hear Gerbera's fretting voice behind me, but I didn't have the time to worry about it.

The moment I leaned on a nearby tree, I threw up everything I had in my stomach on its roots.

In my head—I was looked down upon by eyes, eyes, the eyes!

The pain revives. Suffering. Sadness. A downtrodden heart. Why me? Why the lot of you? The underside of shoes on my forehead, sent flying with a kick, abnormal sounds from my ribs. It hurts. It hurts. I'm afraid. Then eyes meet. Eyes that have lost their light. Eyes of a corpse. Become just like me, the acquaintance whom was already killed. Also, the acquaintance who I killed. I don't want to die. I don't want to believe this!

If I turned my gaze upwards, I feel like there would be a frozen grin.

Grin. Grin. Grin.

"A-, ga... urgh."

"A-art thee ill, Milord?!"

Gerbera, who had followed after me closely, placed her hand on my shoulder. I immediately jerked away as though a hot object had scalded me.

At that moment, feelings of worry for me flowed into me through the path. Gerbera's heart, who is anxious about me. Confusion on not knowing what should be done. Also, lamentation.

'She, a monster of the Family's emotions regarding 'Me the Master', all of it.

"...Ah?"

And so, I was finally able to remember that this place was not the collapsing Colony.

I became conscious of the present and my identity; that became the link that I had to rely on—one that led me from my mindscape back into reality.

My vision blurred.

When I came to, my cheeks had tears spilled all over it.

"Gerbe... ra?"

"Milord! Art thee awake?!"

Although I would feel better if my back was rubbed, as a monster, Gerbera doesn't seem to know what to do. I could hear a voice that's on the verge of crying.

"Ah, Milord. Hath I spoken some ill?"

"It's nothing like... U-ugh."

As I tried to speak to a flustered Gerbera, I vomited again.

"A-ah... Milord!"

"I... I'm alright, so calm down a little."

It's the presence of a flustered Gerbera; it seems to have reminded me that I'm her Master; it functioned like a tranquilizer.

I spat out saliva mixed with vomit.

Alright. My lips are still trembling, but this should make it slightly easier to talk.

I wiped the corners of my mouth and faced Gerbera.

"I was just a little tired. It's not a big deal."

"Indeed? Yet thy visage is white as a sheet."

"Not a problem, if I rest a bit, it'll subside right away. You probably don't know, but humans are delicate creatures."

They were words I used to gloss over the facts, but the latter half of it was too true to be funny.

Ah, shit. How unsightly.

"...Sorry, but could you bring me the water bottle? The inside of my mouth feels disgusting."

My water bottle was lying on the ground at the place where I was resting at until a while ago.

It was troublesome to walk even there in this condition.

"Y-yes. Understood. Wait upon me."

Gerbera shot over like a bullet, rushing to the water bottle.

Gazing blankly at her back, I peeked into the deep pit in my heart and was shocked.

Even I myself, never thought that I was this abnormal.

It seems that my distrust towards humans had taken root on a physiological level.

Moreover, the fact that I've never noticed it until now is in itself a sign that the condition is severe.

I recalled the term 'PTSD'.

'Paranoia' came to mind as well, but I didn't know much about it.

<TLN: Only in Japan, usage and understanding of 'PTSD' > 'paranoia'...

Anyway, PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. -Blesseser>

PTSD is a type of mental disorder that occurs due to the emotional scars after experiencing tragic near-death experiences.

Because the thing called the 'human heart' is a fragile thing, sometimes it can easily collapse before the greatest fear called 'death'. Or alternatively, PTSD may also develop in a situation when a person's dignity is lost.

The person takes an 'avoidance response' towards the trauma-inducing incident, as well as circumstances that are related to that incident; it causes 'flashbacks' about that incident and they fall into a panic and get a 'feeling of unwellness'.

For my case, it's rather easy to understand. It's 'my classmates' betrayal and attempted murder'.

This time, I tasted the symptoms of my first panic attack... I see, it was the worst feeling.

Because Gerbera, one of the Monsters in my Family was nearby, I was able to recover, but if she hadn't been there, I might have ended up fainting instead.

I became aware of my own mental issues, and at the same time, I had to admit one other fact.

That is, 'I can't trust Kato-san from the bottom of my heart'.

...Just hypothetically.

Whether I can allow Kato-san to wield a weapon.

Whether I can entrust my back to her.

Whether there's actually a need to do these things wasn't the issue in this case.

That's basically what it means to trust another person; as it didn't seem like I could do either of them, that was a big problem.

"Ah, Milord! I have brought water!"

"...Thanks."

I gave my thanks and took the water bottle from Gerbera.

I rinsed my mouth; after drinking some water, I calmed down a little.

However, I did not have the strength to stand.

I shakily walk away from the tree roots that had my vomit splattered over it and sit down heavily.

While doing so, I remembered Kato-san's 'eyes'.

The moment we met, and the occasional times when she showed that gaze.

As if filled with obsession of which the bottom cannot be seen... No. That's also, 'different'. It's different.

Now, from my eyes, I can see that as something else.

Those something that were intently watching me as a human... They were simply pupils and that was all they were doing.

When I try to open the lid, there's nothing complicated about it at all. Her intentions were clear.

In this alternate world, there's no one else Kato-san can rely on other than me.

It's natural for someone in her position to decide to rely on me. Even if it was partly calculative, she had gone through a painful experience, and if I tried putting myself in her shoes, especially on an emotional level, I'm sure that I would've done the same.

It was such a simple thing, but my past self could not understand her feelings.

Because I couldn't understand her, I had thought that it was something ominous... No, I arbitrarily decided so. I had thought that 'she must be scheming something'.

As a result, I could not reciprocate the only feeling she had directed towards me.

Also, I'll be unable to reciprocate it even in the future.

Despite knowing all of this, my body and heart still rejects her, a 'human'.

This body of mine was too cold-hearted towards her—even though she was the one who saved my life.

Above all, the girl called Kato Mana is too pitiful.

I can imagine her loneliness. I understand her feelings—as if I could take her feelings into my hands—because I was the same in the past.

Even though I understand, I can do nothing about it.

“...What ‘If you’re going to think that you want someone to believe in you, then you have to pile stuff on top just that much’? Hah.”

"Milord...?"

Those were the words I told Gerbera, who was calling out to me worriedly, a few days ago.

Surpassing time, those words pierced my heart directly in the present.

What a farce this is.

That line is something that I should never speak from my mouth.

That's because, even though Kato-san had done her best for my sake, it's not possible for her to obtain my trust.

"Milord..."

Gerbera has been flustered for a while now.

It looks like she didn't know what to do at a time such as this. It couldn't be helped. Even I myself do not know what I should do.

Eventually, she sat down lightly at my side.

When she sat down beside me, the spider legs that she folded, naturally faced me.

Just slightly attracted to the spider legs, I leaned against them.

The white fur feels good. Even though what I'm touching is anthropoid of a bug, I didn't feel disgusted at all. Rather, I felt relaxed by it.

It was then that Gerbera spoke timidly.

"Apologies, Milord."

"Hm?"

"My thoughtless words hast caused this."

It seems that it was impossible to cover up my body's poor physical condition after all.

Perhaps feeling guilty, Gerbera's tone of voice was dispirited.

"I am unable to understand Milord's feelings. I comprehend not the issues between Milord and Lady Kato either. Perhaps I have met Milord too late..."

Gerbera does not share my detest towards humans.

It was because she became a part of my Family after my heart had been healed to a certain extent.

What I'm dealing with is a deep wound that has not yet finished healing.

Gerbera can't do anything about it at all. She had inadvertently touched it with her bare hands.

"...No."

However, I shook my head.

"I have to thank you."

"Eh...?"

"If Gerbera wasn't here, I would have remained oblivious to my mistake."

If it had been Lily or Rose, this would probably not have happened.

They understand the feelings I harbor towards humans, resulting in them being overly careful of my feelings.

Of course, Gerbera had made me depressed, but by no means was it intentional. She would have seen it as a failure.

However, this is a worthy failure.

"Sorry, could you let me stay like this for a while longer?"

When I asked her, she nodded moment by moment, although she made an indiscreet face.

"Thanks."

I closed my eyes.

I pondered while remaining in that position.

I had misjudged Kato-san.

Because of that, I had made her feel lonely. Despite that, she had even bet her life and fought for my sake.

If that's the case, then I must answer her.

Can I actually overcome these wounds of mine and also repay Kato-san for what she has done for me?

It'll probably take time. It could be impossible. Even so, in order to do this, I must make an effort to do so. Because this is the duty I must fulfil as someone who has become indebted to her.

About now, I wonder what Kato—who must be lonely—is doing? When I think about it, I don't feel that much pain in my heart.

Chapter 04: Doll's desire

Rose's POV

For me, creating things is almost equal to the significance of my existence.

When I picked up my favorite knife as always, I have begun to sharpen the wood and carved it down to a reasonable size.

Any individual magic puppet can create magic knives to their heart's content.

However, the creator's skill is important of course.

Though usually magical puppets only make tools when it is necessary, I by master's order, always make a new tool every day. It is probably because of that, that my technique of making magic tools has improved recently.

I only have to make better things.

By doing so, I'll be able to help master more.

The time spent shaving wood is blissful for me.

There is a certain feeling of being useful.

I am living now.

Despite being a doll without any blood, I have this outrageous thought.

For me who was given the name Rose, there are two moments of birth.

The first, is becoming the monster called a magical puppet.

My parent, a monster with the same body as I, wandered around this deep forest collecting magic from the air little by little and created a clone of itself.

I am the culmination of this work.

Needless to say, the other is the time I met master.

At that moment, this nameless magical puppet received the name Rose.

From that time, I was given the important duty to make various items including weapons and protective gear by master.

Sometimes I would make equipment, other times necessities of life and simple furniture.

Now I'm in the arachne's nest, remaking the destroyed equipment.

" ... "

There were eyes quietly watching my work.

It is not master.

He has gone to search the forest.

Pushing my objections aside... No, it is fine.

The subject now, should be this current gaze.

"Is it fun to watch?"

"Yes."

To my question, Kato who has wrapped her body in a sheet, smiled a little on the corner of her mouth and nodded.

"I think it's very interesting and strange."

Kato said so and took the buckler I made in her hand.

A black shield with a smooth surface.

"Though it's only using wood, the finished product looks like metal."

She said so, and played on the black surface of the shield with her nail which had grown a little.

GIIN, I heard a dull sound.

Recently, my work changes into a blackish shade.

The change wasn't only cosmetic, it was also incredibly hard and durable.

It feels totally different from the original wood material.

However, she mentions it as "strange".

As for me, I didn't think so.

The things I made, will be goods with magic.

Since I am a magical puppet, that is my characteristic as a monster, no part of it was strange.

I do not really understand what Kato was questioning.

"It's strange?"

"Yes... Huh? Isn't this strange to Rose-san?"

Kato sees me nodding and has a slightly difficult expression on her face.

"Ah, is that so? Rose didn't learn the concept of the atom with a textbook like us. ...Come to think of it, Mizushima-senpai said that I was like a swallow at a sandy beach; whenever I was there, I would roost forever."

Kato mutters.

I answer her by carving the wood silently.

This scene occurred often recently.

By the way, Lily-neesama is taking a rest away from us, and didn't participate in this conversation. Though it is safe if she moves slowly, our

overly worried master gave neesama a strict order to rest until she is completely recovered.

These were the details, and I was to serve as Kato's companion alone.

"Creating magic tools."

Kato-san patted the black shield with the ball of her finger

"It may be normal to Rose, but it is amazing to me. Magic is amazing isn't it?"

"I only use magical power, it isn't magic in the strictest meaning."

"Because it is not magic, to be able to make all these things, it is Rose's skill that is amazing."

"Thank you very much."

"I think that Mashima-senpai thinks so too."

When I took my eyes off my hand and looked up unconsciously, Kato smiled cheerfully.

" ... "

She seems to know precisely what I'm gladdest about.

"If there is something I can do please tell me."

" ... "

Just how much does she understand what is said?

While thinking about that, I presented her the buckler I had been fixing.

"Then could you take this to the disposal site?"

"Oh? Is this one also to be thrown away?"

"It's because idle thoughts were mixed in."

I hand over the shield which was only roughly completed, to Kato.

Kato lowered her eyebrows slightly and took the shield.

"Have I possibly disturbed you?"

"No, this is an unrelated matter."

"Then it's fine...I've thought this for a long time, but Rose makes quite a lot of failures."

Kato glanced at the worthless wood piled away from here.

Since I've been making things over the last few days, those are the results of repeated failures.

Although there is plenty of resources nearby, the time spent still feels a bit wasteful.

However, I do not intend to compromise with my work.

"Everyone's lives depend on my armour, I can not offer something poorly made."

"Ah. I see. Rose is a craftsman."

Kato said in an understanding tone as she threw away my failure.

In the meantime, I chose a new piece of wood and broke it into a rough shape.

There are peculiarities in each piece of wood. Processing it it is necessary to understand the peculiarities. This, doesn't change even if it's me finishing the work with magic.

When I touch it, I naturally know what form will suit it best.

I just molded the wood in my hand into a long and slender shape. The final shape will be a sword. Generally the image appears in my head at this point. I can only bring it close to the image afterwards.

Whilst I do that, Kato returns and sits down in front of me.

She pulls the sheet over her shoulders, and up to her lips looking content. During yesterday's conversation, I heard that she seems to feel relieved when wrapped in the sheet. Like the metaphor 'When a baby has its towel it settles down' (Note: Some Japanese metaphor) To me who was never a baby, it is difficult to understand.

Kato wrapped in sheets, slowly began to talk as usual.

"Is Gerbera the cause of the failures?"

A bakiri sound is made, and the piece of wood broke into two in my hands.

" ... "

I was stunned for a while.

Kato lowered her head apologetically, and then I began to move again.

"I'm sorry, I have disturbed you this time."

"...Not at all."

Though Kato was the cause, I'm the one who made the mistake.

I shake my head side to side disapprovingly, and put aside the wood which had become useless.

I pick up a new piece of wood. While shaving it down, I ask.

"Why are you talking about Gerbera?"

"I'm sorry, I overheard you speaking with Mashima-senpai before."

Is it the conversation from 3 days ago?

That's the time I appealed for master to be wary of Gerbera.

She seems to have overheard that.

There is no meaning in hiding it now.

"It's as you say."

The idle thoughts disturbing my work were about Gerbera.

I was worried about Gerbera.

Master forgives Gerbera.

As his familiar I should also forgive her.

My mind understands this.

However my heart disagrees.

I am master's shield.

I want to shoulder his burdens with this artificial body of mine.

I wouldn't mind even if my body is destroyed as a result.

For me who has that determination, the events of that night where I was not able to do so, are a very bitter memory.

That night, I felt despair when master was taken away.

I felt rage when I reached the arachne's nest, and saw that master was hurt.

Both feelings left an unpleasant burning sensation in me.

That alone, makes it incredibly difficult for me to forgive her.

Furthermore, the thought that is fatal for each other...I can not understand the reason why Gerbera decided to act so violently.

『I want to make master mine alone.』

Gerbera's actions were born from that impulse alone.

The emotion of wanting to make something important to you, yours alone, is an emotion anyone can have.

However, I was born without those feelings in hand.

This isn't a problem of good and bad anymore.

The problem is that, I can not understand her because of our ingrained differences of personality.

It is difficult to forgive someone without understanding them.
Such a thing is fatal.

Even I want to forgive her, whom master forgives.
...I have that feeling, but the problem is still there.
I feel that I can not forgive her.

Even if my mind understands that master also wishes for it...

"...I am ashamed."

I can not comply with master's will.
It is shameful as one of his familiars.

"I don't think it's necessary to feel ashamed."

However, Kato shook her head in disapproval to me.

"Rose tends to deny her feelings too much."

"I deny my feelings too much?"

"Though the position of putting Mashima-senpai's thoughts and feelings first is a virtue as a partner... When you go too far, that is called denying your own feelings."

"Is that no good?"

The things Kato said did not really appeal to me.

"Master accepts Gerbera and decided she is forgiven. I should go along with his decision. It's because we exist to grant master's hope. For that reason my will does not matter."

"I figured Rose would think that way..."

A bitter smile was mixed with her voice as Kato spoke.

"However, even if that is the case, is Mashima-senpai pleased with Rose denying her feelings?"

"..."

It was difficult to deny what she said.

Master cares deeply about his familiars.

He seems to think of us as more important than himself.

"In that case, what does Kato think I should do about Gerbera?"

This time, I asked Kato.

I can not manage myself in my current state.

I do not understand Gerbera or what action I should take.

Therefore this chance to hear Kato's advice was not bad for me.

The figure of Kato facing a battle without a weapon was still clear in my mind.

She has a great understanding of what is in a person's heart.

She may find a destination for this impasse in my heart.

There was something that made me expect this of the girl called Kato Mana.

"Isn't it fine if Rose just forgives her once you think you can?"

Kato opened her mouth after I paused a little.

"You shouldn't deny your feelings. Mashima-senpai does not wish for that and surely a strain will begin to form."

"A strain?"

"For example, Rose-san killed her feelings for Gerbera, but at the same time, also took away the chance for atonement for her. So to you, even after a while has passed, she won't be forgiven."

"...There is also that way of looking at it."

Kato's opinion was interesting to me.

I noticed my hand had stopped working and I was facing towards Kato.

A conversation with her only had that value.

"Afterward it'll be up to each other's effort with Gerbera...Well I believe senpai will surely do something."

Kato had a faraway look.

Her eyes look gloomy, but her gaze looks reliable.

The world she sees is surely, remarkably different from me.

"Rose wants to accept Gerbera."

"Yes, but I do not think that I can forgive her."

"Really?... That might be so. In a sense that may be only natural."

Only natural.

Kato expressed my current state as such.

"Because Rose does not have any desires."

"Desires huh?"

"There is a bad impression when I say so."

Kato let out a small laugh.

"However, for example, even Majima-senpai has thoughts of 『I want to be by the side of someone I love』. Senpai's 『Love those people and desiring to meet with them』 is a hope that Rose-san, who is like his family, should be familiar with. Even this is a form of greed. I think that is the case."

"...A desire"

"Even if I say desire, you're free to express it as hope. Because it doesn't change the meaning much. The important thing is his『Humanity』. That is the same for Lily-san and Gabera-san."

For example, is it Lily-neesama's wish to be loved by master?

Or it may be that Gerbera hopes to get along with the rest of the family.

"Rose seems to have a bias against this desire. 『something I want to do.』, 『something I want you to do.』, and 『something I want you to give.』 Though there are various forms of desire, Rose seems to be particularly biased against this last one."

"Simply put, is my character defective?"

"That's not true."

Kato denied my doubt with a strong tone.

"It's just an undeveloped bias. Even if you make a mistake that isn't a defect."

"Asserting it is so..."

"It is possible. It is possible to assert it. Because it has not even been a few months since Rose obtained sentience. Even if the mind is immature, isn't it natural?"

I was caught off guard by what she pointed out.

It was certainly just like that.

I have two moments of birth.

The birth as a magical puppet and secondly, the birth as the individual named Rose.

However, it must be the latter where you can say "birth" in a more essential meaning.

When I only had a crude will as a doll and my existence was quite thin.

Compared to that, I have a master to serve, and everyday I serve him has a very vivid colour.

For me who is a magical puppet there is no infancy.

However in respect to feelings, my recent birth is something like a newborn baby.

My emotions are undeveloped and immature.

To say nothing of Lily-neesama, they aren't even as developed as Gerbera.

I want to be there for Master. I want to work for him. Everything beneficial to him『I want to do it』. It was just that, although all of it was what I wanted to do, it could be undeveloped feelings.

That is to say, I like Master....so Gerbera's out of control feelings of『I want to do something』, was something that I couldn't understand.

Perhaps, it is the reason I do not understand the subtleties of a person's heart.

"However, are there even any desires in me?"

Even if I am a doll who is not provided with perfect emotion, if it is one outcome of 『Humanity』, it does not seem to be strange.

However, Kato shook her head and denied my concern.

"There is. What Mashima-senpai wishes for, wouldn't be a convenient doll. It should be for others with the firm character. The relationship of Rose and Gerbera is the reason it is becoming complicated in this way at the moment. Then Rose-can have a wish."

"But, I can't think of anything."

Whether or not she understood that I was perplexed, Kato had a considerate expression.

Being lost in thought for a while.

A wrinkle disappeared from her eyebrows which stopped before long.

"So far, has Rose not thought about happiness?"

To Kato's question, I tilted my head to one side.

"Happiness?"

"Yes"

Kato nodded.

"Is it not the desire of Rose to have happiness like that once again?"

"I see"

With a simple suggestion, I was lost in thought for a while.

Happiness.

Happiness huh?

For now, being able to serve master is my happiness however...

"Other than, I was able to serve Senpai, or I was useful to senpai."

Kato gives me a warning. Well I understand what she's saying.

A wish that I must find must be a desire 『Something I want to do』 or 『Something I want you to do』. Because I'll be finding a side of myself that I did not know until now. I can grow up simply by doing so.

Happiness.

Hap-pi-ness.

" ... "

When I had the word in my head, there was something that flashed

across my mind incidentally.

-...Rather, it is so happy it is frightening.

"Rose?"

It, was a memory worthy of being called the first treasure in my life.

"Did you think of something?"

"Ah, no. That...no I didn't."

I have denied Kato who noticed a small gesture.

Rather than deceiving this was a mere lie.

Because surely there won't be 『This』.

No matter how you look at it 『This』 will not be permitted.

Kato definitely asked me about any happy memories I have from my short lifetime.

In that department, 『This』 is perfect if I say so myself. It is a memory of my first happiness and it definitely fulfills the conditions she told me.

However that is once 『Again』.

It isn't at an amount which can be called ambitious. This is surely exceedingly audacious.

I should not desire it.

There is no way I can wish for it.

Because I am just a doll.

"Your lie is obvious Rose."

Kato vigorously cut down my lie.

If you lie poorly to her, she'll probably know.

"Rose has already quite seriously thought of something which is『something I want to do.』"

I am grimly reminded of the night I cornered Lily-neesama.

Only one thing is different.

She was doing it for master's sake.

And she is doing that for me today.

She might be seeing through me with her inherent sensitivity.

This is an absolute necessary rite of passage for me.

It's fair to say her conviction gave me a push on the back.

But there was another decisive factor.

I have been made aware of my wish.

It is impossible to go back to not knowing it.

I want to follow the wish I was made aware of even for an instant.

It was decisive for me.

"Ma..."

I gather my courage resolutely and express it in words.

"Master"

I made words

"I want to hug... master..."

As I thought... I regretted forming the words.

I want to hug master.

What is that?

What kind of intention is that?

It may be both a good and bad thing to say.

I have certainly been hugged by master on one occasion.

It was the day I slew his mean male schoolmate.

I hugged him back and snuggled up with master, who fell in a sleep overnight in the evening.

For me without sleeping, that single night was a dream.

Of course that is an exceptional event.

Even I understand it repeatedly.

When a dream is only a dream.

Only a fool would expect it seriously.

Know your place.

I am just a doll.

...Even if I was told so, I could not feign what was in my heart.

My goodness!

I seriously wish to be hugged by master...

"...Oh really! That's lovely Rose!"

Suddenly, I was embraced from the front.

By Kato.

Though I had stiffened, I pushed back her shoulder cautiously when I came back to my senses.

"I am sorry. Kato. Could you get away?"

"Ah, I'm sorry. I unintentionally..."

I separated my body from Kato's and she seemed to feel awkward, lowering her eyebrows.

In that way, she resembled Lily-neesama... Not quite. She resembles Miho Mizushima, whom neesama is imitating.

It is truly the natural appearance of a girl.

Perhaps this is the true appearance of the girl called Kato Mana.

"It is not me whom Rose wants to hug, it's Mashima-senpai."

"Eh, yes. That is, no. However."

"What is it?"

"It is far too presumptuous for a doll like me to be hugged by master."

"That's not true."

Kato said with a criticizing tone.

"By saying that, does that mean Rose will give up?"

"No, if I bother master with my selfishness..."

"I'm sure Mashima-senpai will be pleased if Rose tells him her selfishness."

"If I tell him my selfishness?"

"As far as I see, Mashima-senpai's personality is the sort where he's sorry to always have you carrying out work."

"That's..."

...I think that's possible.

Though I think it is natural that I serve my master, he doesn't assume that's good.

Then, is this a good thing for master?

Ah, no but.

It's no good. It's no good. This is the devil whispering.

"You mustn't give up."

Kato says.

Rather than a devil whispering it was the gentle voice of a kind mother's support.

"Rose doesn't want to annoy senpai. Then if senpai wishes to hug you would it be ok?"

"That would be ok?... It is an unlikely situation."

Despite the events of that night happening.

I don't think they'll happen twice.

"Therefore, you must not give up."

I clenched my hand tightly.

"If you make an effort to achieve your wish...Rose's wish will definitely come true."

"What would you do if you were me?"

"That's simple."

Kato quietly watched me.

"Rose should become so cute that Mashima-senpai wants to hug you."

"Me...cute?"

"That's right. Fortunately, Rose-san has the ability to make tools. Even if there isn't a charm from a witch or mother, or even a special stage direction device, there should be a tool to make oneself cuter."

Kato's suggestion was not at all impossible.

I'm a magic puppet. A monster with a magic knife.

For me, creating things is almost equal to the significance of my existence.

I should be able to remake my existence once again.

But, it's possible that it's impossible, it's not fixed whether or not it is feasible.

"But, would I be allowed to do such an imitation when I'm merely a doll?"

"It's fine already."

Kato asserted.

It might be her strongest tone of voice today.

"Look, when a girl wants a boy to hug them, it's natural for them to try

to become pretty. They do make-up and refine themselves and...These acts are very important for a girl. Even senpai has no right to criticize it."

"But I'm a doll."

"What are you saying? Please think about it. Doesn't a doll think that it's natural to dress up to be hugged by their master? Whether you're a girl, or a doll, there is no reason to obstruct Rose from becoming prettier for senpai, because Rose is a doll of a girl."

Kato repeated that I must not give up.

I was at a loss under her earnest eyes.

Criticism as a familiar about whether it's allowed.

Rationality would be useless if I do something like that.

Everything tied me down completely.

I compared my wish with all of them on one side of the balance.

Which I am really inclined towards.

Staring at the result...I suddenly noticed what I was doing was very stupid.

Because it was clear to me of the weight of my desires when I weigh it.

There's no reason.

This unreasonable and illogical feeling.

Ah. so that's it.

This is 『Something I want to do.』

I might finally understand a fragment of the heart of a person.

"For example, saying that I was dressed to the best of my ability-"

I asked at last.

I think that I want her support.

"-would master be pleased?"

"He'll definitely be pleased."

Kato blessed my decision with a smile.

There is no lie in her words, only affection in her words of encouragement.

I could now feel that properly.

I'm really thankful for that.

If she wasn't here, my wish would have stayed locked up in a corner of my heart until I grow old and rusted.

Without noticing how important it is, it would have rotted away.

Just now, I feel like I'll even be able to forgive Gerbera someday.

What she had done was exasperating, but still, the feeling of dismissing her motive as something incomprehensible, faded away.

It maybe be impossible right now, but sooner or later. Before too long. Surely...

"Of course I'll cooperate with every effort so that Rose can become pretty."

"Thank you very much."

I had pure feelings of gratitude towards her, as an individual, beyond the bounds of familiar or human.

"Kato..."

Therefore I had a question.

"...You're not angry with us?"

"Angry?"

Kato's eyes became round.

"Me? Of Rose? What on Earth, why?"

"After we decided to protect master we were cautious of you and regarded you as an inner enemy. Were you already aware of that?"

"Yes, Lily has told me so face to face before."

It happened before the desperate struggle with Gerbera.

It seems she really did not mind it, and Kato's tone was as steady as the

tone used during the times we talked about casual everyday events.

"Because I said at that time that I had already noticed before."

"Then isn't it ordinary to turn your anger to me? At least, that man Kaga, had raged furiously before he was killed by master."

I remembered the figure of the only human who I had seen besides master and Kato in my mind...

...Though I was slowly forgetting his features.

"Being grouped together with that guy...As expected I hate it."

Kato furrows her brow as she expresses her displeasure.

"I am sorry"

I lowered my head.

However I don't think he's necessarily irrelevant. Usually when keeping a secret from someone, that person will think it's unpleasant. It wouldn't be strange if Kato was holding some ill feelings towards us."

It was not possible to be helped like this, and leave this question alone. Kato had spared her time this way, and helped me solve my troubles.

Kato nodded to my point.

"It's true. I think it's normal for Rose to have some doubts from your viewpoint, still it is normal for there to be unpleasant feelings."

"Then..."

"But, I'm not particularly angry."

It was a cryptic remark.

Kato says it's normal in such cases to become angry and that she is not particularly angry.

I understood that I could not understand and Kato inclined her head.

"...Hmm. Is that so?"

Kato held the shield which I had broken to her chest, while putting a finger to her lips, and then started thinking while wrapped in a sheet.

"To put it plainly, I think I feel sympathy for you familiars."

"Sympathy...To us who are familiars for master who is a human being?"

"Yes. For you."

Except for one point, what Kato says is convincing.

Because she sympathizes with us, for her point of view, there is no anger.

I understand. I understand this much.

But, I do not understand why she is sympathetic in the first place.

We are master's monster familiars.

Our existence is devoted to Master. It is a reality which did not change even when I became aware of my own wish.

In what way does Kato, who is a human sympathize with us?

"Besides."

And, Kato continued.

"I wish to express my gratitude to Rose."

"Gratitude?"

"Aren't you talking to me normally without doubting me in particular? Only Rose does that."

"What do you mean?"

When I asked in surprise, Kato made a wry smile.

"I heard the conversation on that night about whether to bring me along from the beginning... I know that Rose has a serious character and is not the type who can possibly hide her doubts from appearing on her face."

"My face is flat though."

"Yes, that part was a joke."

"..."

I don't understand whether I'm serious or whatever, but, I may indeed

be simple.

It is something I'm aware of, but including master, I'm probably the stupidest in this party.

It's good to hear that I'm serious and faithful, but in actuality, I'm honest to a fault and am not flexible enough to think of the correct answer by myself. This matter with Gerbera is a good example.

If I temporarily doubt Kato, she'll be aware immediately.

I see. What Kato says is reasonable.

I surely do not doubt her unlike master and Lily-neesama.

Of her maybe betraying us.

Or what she is thinking about.

I do not think about these things.

Or, is the person who doesn't understand the reason that she's doubted correct?

To be honest, I do not have a good impression of the creatures called human beings, who bullied master. Therefore I did not like Kato in the first meeting very much either.

However, whilst spending time with her, my opinion of her has gradually changed.

Probably the circumstance surrounding me are different from Lily-neesama.

Originally I was given the role of protecting 『master who doesn't have power to fight』 there is some similarity with 『she who doesn't have power to fight』. Also unlike Lily-neesama who has Miho Mizushima's memories, I don't have the large amount of time spent with Kato occupying my mind.

Because of this, when we were attacked by the white arachne, I didn't have any hesitation in bringing Kato along with us.

At the same time, Kato put her life on the line for master and acted.

There's no longer any reason to suspect her.

Rather...

I don't want to, and never intend to say it.

To me, the suspicions master held towards Kato was a little strange.

How should I put it. When speaking clearly, even I thought it was abnormal.

However the cause of master's suspicions was so clear, that even I as a doll could guess.

The massive wound carved in master's heart.

The pain which continues to torment him.

Probably, master will not accept Kato unless this pain is cured.

"I really thank Rose for believing in me."

As a result, I have been interested in the lonely Kato for a long time.

"If it's possible I want to be friends."

When having this suggested to me, I was surprised and convinced.

"A friend...?"

"It's difficult after all."

I once thought it was difficult.

She has been kind to me. She has taken care of me about matters regarding master today too.

I must return that kindness.

However I am a familiar, and she is a human.

Our views are different. Our positions are different. Our sense of values are different and above all, our races are different.

Everything is so different, it's hopeless.

Therefore it's difficult to become friends.

No, but.

Isn't an important thing the same.

"...It's useless after all."

Kato makes a thin smile.

A smile formed to express that just now, was a joke.

I feel my heart tighten when I saw her face laugh so fleetingly.

Incomprehensible feelings rushed wildly within me.

I might have suppressed this impulsive thought as a useless thing before now.

However today I knew what it was.

I only just learnt it a little while ago.

She had just taught it to me.

I truly understood how important it was.

I was supported by this impulse, and I spoke to the sad smile I had noticed.

"If master orders it, I will point my blade at you."

"Yes."

Kato's eyes are wide open in surprise at the words I said.

I would be surprised. Even I'm surprised by the things I said.

Kato looked puzzled after a little while.

“Why suddenly say such an obvious thing?”

Do you think this is something obvious?

Yet why did you say you want to be my friend?

This mentality is impossible to me to guess at the moment.

It isn't even possible to guess just a fragment of the inner thoughts of this girl called Kato Mana.

There was one thing that had become clear to me.

That is, she was serious about what she had said earlier—she truly wanted to become my friend.

Then, I will also answer her sincerely.

Fortunately, I was taught the important feeling 『something I want to do.』 by her. I was supported by my impulse, rather than rationality, on what I'd like to do when responding to her.

“If you think that I am good enough...”

“Yes.”

“I...I think I also want to be your friend.”

“...What?”

Kato's eyes opened wide.

It could be said that I don't understand what I just said.

A colour of understanding was gradually spreading through my

immature features.

"Th-"

For a split second, her face warped and seemed like it would cry.

"... Thank you very much Rose."

Kato shifted it with marvelous mental power.

However the smile engraved on her lips, was as if she was unable to bear it.

With that alone, I was convinced that this choice was not a mistake.

"Then, my best regards in the future Rose."

Kato stretched out her hand to me.

It was unlike a reproduction of the night I confronted Gerbera, it was a completely different scene.

"Though this feeling now is enough"

"No. This is a necessary thing."

I put down my knife, and clasp the hand Kato held out.

"My regards to you too Kato."

This, was the first event of my friendship with Mana.

Chapter 05: Signs of Ominous Clouds

"GURUUAAA!"

The Fire Fang snarls, bounding through the deep forest.

It weaves between the trees as it runs, crushing shrubs as it tries to go around behind us.

It is so fast that I can barely follow it with my eyes.

However it was not as agile as the white spider.

"GURUUA!?"

It cries out in fright

A white figure stands in the way of the wolf

"Thou shalt not pass"

In an instant, the white spider that should have been next to me stood in front of the wolf and laughed with a girlish smile
and with a single blow.

"Fuun"

"GYAUN!?"

The white spider or rather Gerbera hit the snout of the Fire Fang barehanded.

Even simply pushing out her hand with pure strength was enough to cause a fatal wound.

A few fangs broke off and the giant wolf over 2 metres in length was blown off in the opposite direction.

As expected of a monster, even though the bones in its neck appear to be broken, the Fire Fang stood up with a dripping nosebleed.

"Rrrrrr...!"

It let out a restrained groan and turned around.

The Fire Fang realized it was at a disadvantage and turns tail to run away.

Of course, there's no reason to let it go quietly.

"M'lord!"

Gerbera returns to me quickly and hands me the large shield. I put it on my back as usual when moving around.

And then she lifted me up with her slender arms.

Up to this point, it was the usual routine.

All of Gerbera's movements were quick and precise. So much that I was

fascinated.

After all she is a god-sent child who shines in battle.

...The previous everyday feelings of misfortune feel like a lie.

Well, it wasn't all bad, there were some lovely points in them.

"Take care to not bite thy tongue"

"I wish you'd have said that when I met you."

"...Thee promised not to speak of that."

Gerbera gave my poor joke a dirty look, but I want her to forgive this much.

Anyway, at present I'm being held in the so called 'Princess carry'.

I feel so pathetic that I could cry.

I would have rather been piggy backed, but she rejected it because there is a problem with safety when running through the forest.

"Here we go."

She called out to me and then began to run like an arrow released from a bow.

The trees of the forest drift by rapidly.

The speed is unbelievable. Though if it were present day Japan I'd be accustomed to it from riding in cars, this is a forest with many obstacles. I believe if I were to run at the same speed I would definitely hit a tree before I even travel 5 metres. Our reflexes are undoubtedly different.

Furthermore I figured out that she is being considerate of the vibrations as she carries me.

If I was to ride on Gerbera's back that would be impossible to do. The only way was to hold me in her arms.

As she runs, my eyes gradually got used to it.

I confirm the back of the fleeing Fire Fang. It also ran through the forest at a tremendous speed.

But Gerbera was even faster.

We continue keeping a constant distance without reaching it or losing it. For the one being pursued it was unbearable.

We encountered the Fire Fang while Gerbera was guiding me to the nearby water source.

It attacked and we countered, leading to now.

This Fire Fang appears to have come alone to the spring for a drink of water. However this type of monster usually travels in a pack.

In this area there are leftover strays caused by the scouting group. This kind of situation is unusual. Normally they would move in a group.

Consequently.

"UOOOOOOOON!"

Is that a howl or a scream?

A few seconds after the wounded Fire Fang's howl, the howls of wolves responded from various directions.

"The strategy was a success."

"Indeed"

When I muttered Gerbera nodded.

"I'd say it was from five or six places."

Wolves jumped out of the forest from both the left and right as I finished speaking.

"GURUUAAA!"

Red flames spew from the wolf's mouth and licks the forest, scorching the towering trees and incinerating a shrub in an instant.

Gerbera jumps up to avoid being injured by the flame and lands onto one of the trees.

"GU...!"

There is a rustling sound as I brush through the leaves. It is painful, but I grit my teeth without complaining.

Gerbera relocates to another tree immediately. The tree we were on a moment ago was surrounded by several streaks of flame and flared up like a candle.

"I give my utmost apology, there doth not appear to be a beast that is worthy enough of being a fellow mistress."

At Gerbera's words I also look down at the figures of the six wolves which look up at us and howl.

I also confirm it and nod.

"Looks that way."

"Very well, then there is no reason to hesitate."

Thread flies from Gerbera's hand.

Half of them manage to evade this, but the remainder are caught without being able to successfully escape. Gerbera easily fished up the three wolves, and releases them...without hesitation she bashes them head first into the ground.

"I guess it's over."

It did not take Gerbera long to annihilate the wolves.

* * *

After everything had ended we held a strategy meeting.

By the way, even though we killed six Fire Fangs, because it is difficult to take everything back, after we appropriately dismantled them, the majority will be left behind.

Although the entire pelt we skinned from the boss is good, the rest aren't pretty.

"Firstly, was this a success?"

Gerbera nods to my words.

"Tis so. However, not finding any familiars is an issue."

"That cannot be helped. To begin with I'm pleased that instead of the trial and error which took us three days before only took us less than half a day this way."

We went and searched the area around the spring Gerbera told me about.

As Gerbera had said, a lot of monsters definitely appeared in the vicinity and we encountered three monsters in succession.

The last one was the Fire Fang just now.

It's most efficient to look for groups of monsters to meet as many as possible. With the combat prowess of the white Arachne there is no trouble routing enemies.

Though it is quickest to encounter a group from the beginning, just like a little while ago sometimes they may move independently.

Monsters 『Don't have individual will.』However the world we are in there is 『Intelligence at the level of wild animals.』

In that case, if I wait for it to call its companions I can search more efficiently.

Those were the details of the battle a little while ago.

The strategy I came up with beforehand played out splendidly and I was able to encounter eight monsters in only a few hours.

"If we don't return soon the sun will set."

"Indeed."

It was not a bad situation.

On the other hand, there was not much time left.

Lily recovers steadily and Rose will replace the lost equipment.

I need to speed things up...

While heading home, I focused on thinking of ideas.

* * *

When we returned to Arachne's nest, I was met by Lily whose whole face was smiling.

"Welcome back, master!"

She says so while embracing my arm without any visible fatigue.

"I'm back...Are you alright not lying down?"

"I'm already fine. I only got up a few minutes ago. Also, welcome home Gerbera."

"I-indeed. I has't returned."

That reminds me, this is the first time in several days that Lily has embraced my arm this way.

Is it possible that because she had stored pent-up desire that she seems so happy now?

I'm glad that I can touch her while she is happy like this.

This is slightly embarrassing and at the same time I'm happy.

This is because it's obvious that Lily who has become healthy can join us in our search.

However, searching with only Gerbera and I was a little more convenient. What should I do?

o

I receive a dinner full of love that was prepared by Lily while I think about of how to persuade her.

Because Lily has recovered this is the first time all the members assemble since the night of that fierce battle.

The meal is the usual meat of the Fire Fang. As I thought, it's still disgusting. Unfortunately, even Lily's love cannot overturn the failure of the material.

I remember the burgers that I previously ate in Japan; they were artificially made with cheap meat. I never realized how blessed I was...until I arrived here.

"I will go with you tomorrow."

"I suggest you rest for another day at least."

"But"

"Even when I recovered I was careful for a day."

When I persuaded her, Lily looked dissatisfied.

I pretended not to notice her expression and continued eating.

It is a poor way of buying time. Quite frankly my expectations are low on whether or not I will see any results in just one day. However, the chance was better than nothing.

"That's right. That reminds me I needed to speak with you."

I changed the topic a little forcibly to cut off any arguments from Lily.

Besides it was true that I needed to talk to her. There was something I understood as a result of having the opportunity to speak with Gerbera at the spring in the beginning of the day.

◦

It was something regarding that spring I intended to talk about—or not.

I just decided to have the conversation that I had with Gerbera from

several hours ago regarding『Not putting a burden on Lily』and『Not being able to talk to Rose』.

However, it's not like it was necessary to hide the existence of the spring.

.....However, since Gerbera talks poorly, she might make a careless remark about a careless place, in order to hide this I change the topic.

"Gerbera tells me that she is able to escape from this forest."

"Gerbera did?"

When Lily turned her eyes, Gerbera nodded with a firm expression.

There is still a bad atmosphere between them.

Although Lily's posture is nature, Gerbera seemed to feel indebted one-sidedly.

It was Lily who was forced to recuperate until today because she received the most damage amongst us on the day we fought. So it might be something inevitable.

I interrupted in order to follow up.

"Has Gerbera been to the edge of the forest before?"

"A-Aye"

Gerbera nods and begins to speak with difficulty.

"Lily and Rose wouldn't know of it because twas long ago, but there was many times when humans came into the forest in most wondrous numbers, it hath occurred three times in this one's lifetime. Apart from

mine lord, those art the only times this one hath encountered humans. "

"Ah."

At that moment Lily uttered a cry as she had noticed something.

"There were other humans who transferred to this world with master, weren't there?"

I was having the same thought as Lily shared her thoughts.

We have not met with any human beings from this other world.

It is because we transferred so deep within the forest and because Gerbera has only seen humans three other times in her long lifetime, it was unlikely that Lily had ever seen a human before.

"Once we found that cabin, I had the thought that there are probably other people."

"Hmm, I see. That reminds me there was that."

The cabin where we came across Kato at now ruined.

I thought there were humans in this world when I found that.

However there was the possibility that the world I transferred to was dominated by monkeys or the worst case scenario of it being ruled by slugs that stand upright. Since there were monsters it was a serious concern that I could never laugh off.

Hearing that Gerbera had witnessed human beings was a valuable piece of information for me.

Gerbera continues telling an old story.

"Naturally, if many human beings enter the forest, signs of it will arise. We monsters should notice it. They closed in like surging waves. In those days I wast on mine own. Chasing after a human who escaped, I noticed I had driven it to the edge of the forest."

"I think Gerbera probably fought against a human army."

According to Gerbera's story the group were identically equipped. However they had already fallen into chaos when Gerbera arrived and the army was at a disadvantage.

Armor which protects the upper body, a helmet, a sword and shield in each hand...From what I've heard I wonder if it is possibly soldiers belonging to some country of this world? It doesn't seem like she saw any kind of firearms.

I think the reason the main weapon was a sword rather than a spear is to cut down obstacles in the forest.

"It seems that the most direct path out of the forest is to go straight north from here."

"For now it's rejected just in case because it's from long ago. There is also a possibility that the boundary of the forest is different now."

"Nevertheless, isn't this far more progress than when we understood nothing!"

Lily claps her hands together and smiles at Gerbera with a laugh.

As I thought, she does not seem to have anything against Gerbera either. Rather her smile is not affected by Gerbera in anyway, it seemed to show her compromising attitude clearly.

In my current state where I was over thinking things, seeing her act this way has relieved some of my anxiety.

"Huh?"

Lily's eyes became round as she realized something.

"But...If I am not mistaken wasn't 『East』the direction that the first expedition headed?"

"Yes. It seems the first expedition didn't have any luck."

We who followed them cannot be called lucky either.

Of course, they may have noticed along the way and changed course. In that case, they would have left information for Kato and Miho Mizushima's childhood friend Jun Takaya who were in pursuit of the first expedition corps, but they never caught up.

"Although we would pass through the forest eventually even if we go east."

Even this forest couldn't possibly spread out for ever. Actually the forest seems to come to an end on the north side.

"Well then, are we going north from here on?"

"...That is, to tell you the truth, I'm a little hesitant."

If I go east it's possible that I may eventually join the first expedition.

This is the best option for Kato's protection. On the other hand, getting out of the forest will take longer.

I must leave this forest sometime soon. It's because the living environment in this forest is too bad for me. The safety situation has considerably improved now that Gerbera has joined us, but for example the food problem doesn't become better with more physical strength.

Surely I should leave the forest now. There is also the possibility of finding a human village in the future. Rather, the chances are quite good. If there is an army, there might also be a nation, because an army can't be organized without a society.

If I visit a village I can obtain necessary supplies.

The problem is whether or not I can find a safe place for Kato but...

"...Well, it's not necessary to make a decision immediately."

I concluded as such. I could make a mistake if I rush. It isn't necessary to decide right now either. I should only act after carefully thinking about it.

"Speaking of which."

The one who interrupted was Kato who had been listening to our conversation.

"—!"

When I heard her voice, I stopped my hand which was grabbing a skewer of Fire Fang meat unconsciously.

"...Is something wrong Kato?"

I replied and took a bite of the meat skewer I had grabbed once more.

Because I resumed movement immediately, Lily probably noticed my odd action and snuggled up near me. She was staring at the side of my face questioningly.

"No. It's just that Gerbera said she has only seen human beings three times other than us."

"That should be the case...right?"

"In-indeed"

When I prompted her with a glance, Gerbera nodded like a small child. Kato, being aware of Gerbera's weak point continues.

"School uniform...have you met a human wearing clothes like us?"

"Those like mine lord who transferred hither or those with cheat abilities? No, this one hath not met any like that."

"In that case...senpai?"

Because Kato was drawing it out I looked up from my meat skewer.

These days the unrest has settled down.

Still when our eyes met there was a strange beat in my heart.

"Haven't you found a dismembered corpse before? If it's true that Gerbera didn't meet those who transferred, even if it wasn't her doing, the fact that they were killed won't go away."

"...come to think of it that did happen."

We had found the dismembered corpses of five people including a cheat ability user before.

Despite being a『Warrior』with only high physical and magical ability, cheat ability users are not often killed by monsters. With their unfair battle ability, if it wasn't a high rank monster they wouldn't be killed. It would be difficult even for Lily.

Originally we were afraid of meeting this high monster we had found evidence of and it was suggested that we move from the cave we rested in.

Afterwards we were ambushed by a white Arachne who is a high monster.

So surely I unconsciously thought 'was it her doing?' — rather I almost forgot about it for various reasons I did not think about it too much — if you think about it calmly it is a little odd.

That corpse was bitten to death by a beast.

However, even if white Arachne is a high monster it's not a large carnivore type of monster.

"Dismembered body? What is that?"

As I thought, Gerbera doesn't know about it.

In that case, other than her, is there an exceptional monster nearby?

Otherwise it wouldn't make sense, however if that was the case, there are some problems.

It isn't that two great monsters...cannot coexist; it is just that in order to become a high monster they need to live for a long time and not coming across each other in that time would be difficult.

The monsters do not come near the Arachne nest we are in now. That's because the monsters which approach here have been eliminated for a long time.

Monsters are not only hostile to humans, but other monsters except for their own kind. In some respects computer RPGs are good. Monsters of various kinds are equals and do not attack each other.

We are five days travel by foot from where we saw the dismembered corpse. It's possible a monster could do it in less.

I'm overwhelmed by the length of Gerbera's life. Something feels out of place with two powerful monsters coexisting in such close proximity for such a long period.

Well, there are things like this I guess...?

Since there isn't any evidence to deny it, I could only accept it.

"Anyway, it never hurts to keep in mind"

"That's right, isn't it?"

Still, Kato is excellent.

I realize that I did not properly notice it.

An able person...if I had to say it feels like it's slightly off the mark. Kato makes good points. Even if you subtract the bad points, in my eyes she is a clever and wise character.

It feels like she often pulls the short straw by comparison... this is only because she herself causes it by hesitating.

What makes her do so?

When I think about it it's a mystery.

...What do you think about and how?

It was suspicious when I thought about it.

" ... "

I grit my teeth and swallowed a bitter thought.

I am disgusted with myself for thinking this way about my saviour

Since I have finally become conscious of her and can think about it normally...there is no longer an excuse for thinking this way. The fact that she is indeed my benefactor and life saviour cannot be ignored.

In any case.

The only thing that is certain is that she has the ability to cover for a part that I'm lacking in.

I told Gerbera that if she needed to consult someone she should speak with Kato.

That's right.

After all I have to do something about her relations with the others soon.

While confirming that it's not possible to do so now, I had already fallen asleep in preparation for tomorrow which is the last valuable opportunity with Gerbera.

...Realizing that this was a failure, it would become something for a little later.

Chapter 06: Passage of the spirit, the way of magical power

The next day I decided to leave the Arachne's nest early in the morning.

"My Lord. I hath done as thee requested."

Right before leaving, Gerbera handed me upside down clothing

They are clothes I asked Gerbera to make before.

Though Gerbera weaves at an impressive speed, producing this in such a small amount of time seems to have been unreasonable as half of the clothes appears to be from previous stock.

The shirt is of simple design with slightly thick long sleeves made durable for walking through the forest. The pants are also white becoming white top and bottom.

The coordination feels out of place and unusual, but complaining about that is a luxury.

"It suits thou my lord."

"...Is that so?"

When I return from changing my clothes, Gerbera fidgets and her cheeks turn red for some reason.

Was she glad I was wearing the clothes she made or was it because she noticed we are wearing similar clothes?

Or because this is a spider's thread, in a certain sense it can be said that my appearance『Is wrapped in a thread she produced』perhaps she could feel something.

In addition, when I put on the blackish hue protective gear that Rose prepared for me on top... you might say the colour balance has been attained.

Finally I added a sword of pseudo-Damascus steel on the belt I made with a vine and my preparations are complete.

It's perfect at present, the work have been divided with equipment made by Rose and clothes woven by Gerbera, I want them to cooperate with each other's work in the future.

Right now they'll cooperate for my sake, but if the present state of them being unwilling to work continues into the future it'll be problematic.

It won't be resolved immediately and it isn't necessary to rush it. After all their ill feelings are lost it's should be possible.

"My lord!"

I suddenly notice for some reason Gerbera is writhing, her expression seemed anxious as she looked at my face.

"What's wrong?"

"Nay, I hath thought my lord looketh a tad pale."

"I do?"

I touched my cheeks unintentionally.

The feeling at the tips of my fingers seems somewhat cold.

"No, there's nothing wrong in particular. Don't worry about it."

Certainly I had a lot to think about recently and I was not able to sleep very much yesterday.◦

However, my physical condition isn't bad and I don't feel sleepy either. Some fatigue remains from walking day after day, but it's still at a level where I can stay active. I can't rest from this amount.

"Let's go"

I suggested to Gerbera who lowered her eyebrows anxiously as I left the

nest.

She also seemed to understand that I'm truly fine when I start moving and said nothing further.

After an hour or so we came to the spring which was our destination.

As it's the water source for the surrounding creatures, the spring is considerably large.

We continued walking further for approximately one hour and encountered two monsters.

A Rough Rabbit with the body of a bear and the head of a rabbit and the other one was a crawfish like monster about one metre in length that had broken the surface of the water of the spring and jumped out.

It's something I'd like to encounter once more.

Because both are monsters I'm encountering for the first time, I want to feed them to Lily to increase our war potential.

...It's enough to eat once? Though that is a reasonable opinion, I'm not talking about that.

To make use of Lily's mimesis ability you must serve her the majority of the monster's corpse. In other words it means that we cannot eat the Rough Rabbit and Big Scissors.

Of course, our food situation is not so desperate that I am driven to eat the meat of these.

There is enough Fire Fang meat saved up.

Simply, there's no reason to challenge myself to eat, but I wanted to eat them.

...Quite frankly I was tired of Fire Fang meat.

I wasn't a person who particularly loyal to a specific meal, but I got tired of eating the same food all the time.

I want to eat the meat of a different animal soon.

Other than a lizard or a rat.

In particular the Big Scissors looks delicious.

As it is a crawfish it might be a little rough and tasteless, but I held the firm belief that would not be much of a problem. Anyway, the current food circumstances are just too bad.

However I can no longer increase our baggage.

Furthermore whilst I continue searching I look forward to taking home

the next Big Scissors as food.

Whilst I thought about such things, Gerbera finished 『Packing』 and came over here.

Because the Fire Fang is huge, the cocoon that wrapped it up was very large.

The sight of it being dragged is a little humorous.

“Good work.”

“My lord as well, thy work was good.”

Gerbera says words of appreciation and presents the flask Rose made to me.

Even though there is a spring nearby, if just drinking it causes a stomach ache it would be embarrassing. I used what I brought with me as drinking water.

Because water is heavy, except for a small amount to quench my thirst while walking, everything was entrusted to Gerbera whilst moving.

“Thank you.”

I expressed my gratitude and tried to take the flask.

At that time.

"...tsu"

The reflected scenery stings my eyes, innumerable small glittering lights scattered in my sight.

It was just an instant.

However, the timing was bad.

My hand missed receiving the flask Gerbera presented me.

"Ah."

The Flask slipped through my fingers and fell to the ground.

There is a glug glug sound as the water was spilled.

I quickly picked up the bottle, but the contents have decreased by roughly one-third.

...Now I've done it.

Of course, it's not that I regretted losing the water.

"Is thou troubled, my lord?"

Gerbera looked suspicious and stared at me.

"My lord, It hath been on thine mind, but how thou looketh is strange to thee."

"...What is strange?"

"Tis only sometimes, I see thou make unusual mistakes. Could it be thou art holding secrets from thee?"

She says so and stares at me with her red pupils.

Staring and staring, the intensity of her gaze has not softened.

She seems to be very certain.

I thought that I would be able to deceive her somehow, apparently it seems impossible.

It's hopeless huh?

Generally I was spending most of my time with her these days. She's been supporting me, even if it wasn't this time, she would have noticed eventually.

"It's not serious."

After some necessary introductory remarks, I decided to disclose the circumstances with Gerbera.

"For some reason my eyes are strange sometimes."

"Thy eyes?"

"Yeah. They blur and when it's bad I can see glittering white lights..."

"Art that not important!?"

Gerbera jumps with all eight legs and grips my face with both hands.

It wasn't a speed I could avoid.

I was made to look at her handsome features, which made me think they must have been made by a god, as she closely looked at my face.

"Muu"

In a distance where her breath can reach, she stared at my face fixedly.

I had been shocked unintentionally, but Gerbera didn't have the

slightest amorous atmosphere about her.

She stares at my face with an expression which is so serious it's scary.

Of course, if you could understand the condition of others by doing so, doctors wouldn't be needed.

There might also be doctors in this world. ...Or maybe there aren't. In this world magic exists.

"Just sometimes. It's not a big deal. I feel fine."

When I rapidly make excuses, a small wrinkle forms between Gerbera's eyebrows.

"True is that?"

"Yeah. When tired, a human being's vision blurs. It's a common thing."

"My lord spoke the same the day before, hath thou deceived thee?"

"...Anyway, let go of me."

While thinking of the phrase 'you reap what you sow', I cover the lower half of her face with my hand and strongly push her away.

Though it may have been a bit rough on a woman, however the

unusually tough Gerbera didn't seem to care. She crossed her arms and tilted her head in thought.

"However, white lights. ...Yes?"

Her beautiful pure white eyebrows frowned slightly.

"What's wrong Gerbera?"

"Tis' nothing. A little curious was I."

When I asked, Gerbera put her slim right hand before my eyes.

"Thous be sure, look to the hand of thee."

"Uh huh?"

"...I'm not too good at this sort of thing but"

Gerbera says so and screw up her eyes for a few seconds.

"Eh?"

As I was watching Gerbera's fingertip I instinctively let out a stupid sound.

A white light on Gerbera's fingertip was flickering.

It was the light I had been seeing sometimes these past few days.

"H,How..."

"Tis as I suspected."

Gerbera seemed a little tired as she withdrew her hand.

The light has already disappeared from her fingertip.

"I thought it was impossible but"

Gerbera let out a small and said,

"My lord is obtaining the ability to perceive magical power."

"Magic power? I am?"

"Indeed."

Gerbera makes a large nod with a serious face. I do not get the feeling she's joking.

However, while it isn't impossible, I'm not going to just accept her

words without a doubt.

"Though you say that Gerbera. I shouldn't have an aptitude for magic. Because in the colony the person with the magician cheat ability clearly said so."

"Even if you tell me that, it's still troubling."

Though I give a reasonable opinion, Gerbera did not stop thinking about it.

"...However, if that is true, it's certainly a strange story."

Gerbera folds her spider legs and sat down, leaning her head to the side.

"Anyone can use magic so long as they have magical power. As long as they have magical power it isn't hard to see magical power. After all it's an indispensable art to sense magical power when handling magic. ... However the quality doesn't change easily."

"It's like that?"

"Tis indeed so, attaining of thy magical power is of the many within thy self. Tis mine belief that my lord's quantity of thy magical power hath doth raised for a reason."

For some reason.

She had an unpleasant expression.

It shouldn't be a disadvantage in particular, rather it should be convenient for me, it's only a little unpleasant that I don't understand the cause.

"Is it because of the defeated monsters? If I'm not mistaken, I can take their magical power when I kill a monster. When I was at the colony they tried to strengthen the search corps with that."

"That is not an efficient method. Even if thou defeated one hundred or one thousand could thou actually feel it? Of course, with the way I am and the way mine lord is, thither art some differences."

"Is it because the original amount of magical power is different?"

"It's as thou say. However thou might say, though to begin with just my lord and I being together, it is not all there is to it."

"That's also true."

"In other words there are more efficient methods, it is possible my lord unknowingly undertook such measures."

"That's a little difficult to think about. If a method exists, I want to know it by all means."

I am personally strengthened if my magical power increases.

How much work is required to survive in this severe world?

"Though, it's not a bad thing if I can use magic."

"..."

I conclude thus—possibly, Gerbera gives me a strange look as I set the problem aside.

"What art thou saying mine lord?"

"Huh?"

"Isn't mine lord already using magic?"

You seem to be amazed, but unfortunately I don't have a clue.

Therefore I asked,

"What is it?"

"A path is connected between us mistresses. That is also an excellent kind of magic."

"Is that so?"

"How doesn't mine lord know?"

"Even if you ask me..."

To her even more amazed expression, I scratch my head.

Even if they aren't a cheat ability user they can use magic so long as they learn it. This is a theory which was established in the colony. However, in reality there were only a few exceptions where ordinary students of the 『Reserve Group』who had the opportunity to learn magic.

For students of marriageable age and full of curiosity, the mysterious phenomenon called magic was of great interest. Therefore I also came across some information.

However, there were still many unknowns.

Although, now that she mentions it, she's right, this mysterious power connecting between us seems impossible besides using magic.

Though there is the sense that all mysterious phenomena could easily be labelled as magic, often when thinking that way in this world it won't be wrong.

Then was I using magic subconsciously?

In other words, my cheat ability is an always active type of magic.

A magic that connects my heart with monsters.

It feels kind of fancy when I think about it.

" ... "

Now that I think about it, why would I be given a cheat ability like this?

I suddenly thought.

The people who were transferred to this world received cheat abilities.

This is fine thus far. Though the cause is unclear it's inevitable there are some peculiarities to this world.

Then is it inevitable that I gained this ability?

If that's the case, once again, why this power?

...Though I might appear to be complaining in dissatisfaction, I did not want to complain in particular.

Maybe I wouldn't have had to face such difficulties back in the colony if I had an easily understood ability. Maybe a passive (always on) ability is much too hard to use compared to these my cheat ability seems very

subtle, though.

Honestly, I wouldn't want to stand besides someone who grumbles like that if he were in my position.

Because I possessed this ability I could meet Lily here.

It's impossible to have any complaints.

So I just wondered.

Why am I like this...?

"Unh? Wait, if it's the path"

Then suddenly Gerbera exclaimed

I'm startled and brought back from my thoughts.

When I look, Gerbera appears to have noticed something and stopped moving.

Is something wrong?

.... and about the same time when I was thinking, with a slightly different leap from several minutes ago, Gabera grab my face with both of her hands.

Not again/Again?

Or so I thought, but the situation was slightly different.

"..."

She looks into my eyes the same way as a little while ago.

However her red eyes appeared to be focusing somewhere else this time.

"...So it's like that?"

"Hey, Gerbera."

I couldn't endure it and I called her name angrily.

Feigning displeasure, even though I must not do it, but my voice seems to be shaking a little.

"Please explain without just understanding on your own. Also, I would appreciate it if you let me go."

I am irresponsible, but Gerbera should be more aware of the fact that she's attractive as a member of the opposite sex to men.

Even at best of times, she held me with good will, which makes me reel with excitement.

To begin with she's a member of my family. She a special existence to me, furthermore, yesterday, when I had a moment of weakness I had her spoil me.

Due to the unclear stance that I have regarding the relationship with my female household, I must not be irresponsible. Because I've made up my mind I want to defend this decision.

"Indeed. My apologies."

Gerbera obediently released me as asked.

However she doesn't stop staring deep into my eyes.

"Please listen without being surprised my lord."

Gerbera began to speak to me whilst I felt uncomfortable.

"Inside of thy body"

"Uh huh."

"Mine magic is present."

"...huh?"

I'm dumbfounded by Gerbera's completely unexpected words.

"... That is, that ...What do you mean?"

"I can not really say. Usually something like this is impossible."

Gerbera shook her long white hair with a baffled expression.

"However I can guess. Perhaps it's because of the connection between us. It's because it connects us with my lord."

"Wa, please wait a moment. So, what!? Is the increased magical power I've received from Gerba?"

"Possibly Lily-dono and Rose-dono's may also be mixed in. It would be such a very small amount that I am not able to detect it."

"Such a thing..."

I was about to object reflexively when I noticed there was no evidence to deny her claim.

"Certainly...Certainly, then I can explain the phenomenon of『Flickering before my eyes』in question occurred since I made Gerbera a family member.

As far as I can remember, that『Flickering Light』...That is the detection of magical power, began whilst I was conversing with Lily on the 2nd morning after making Gerbera a family member.

At least, before Gerbera became a family member it never happened.

“But why is it only Gerbera?”

“Isn’t it simply a matter of the quantity of magical power one possesses? For example, why do you think that magical power doesn’t『leak out』from the connection? How about you think of it like magic power leaking out through the pathway? If the proportions stay the same then having a large amount of power means that more will spill out, right?”

“I see...”

I wasn’t able to notice if a similar phenomenon had occurred until I made Gerbera a family member.

That reminds me, I heard that『magic dwells in the soul』in the colony.

I’m just an ordinary student who can’t tell what kind of thing a soul is and can’t distinguish a『Soul』from things like the『Heart』or『Mind』.

However, if you assume they are similar...Even if it isn’t true, if you assume they are closely connected...Even if my path let’s magic power

through, it might not be strange.

Of course this isn't certain.

Nonetheless, that's not what was important to me.

"In short, what?"

After I moistened my lips with my tongue, I squeezed out my voice and asked,

"The more my family increase, the stronger my magic power becomes?"

"I expect it will be like that. Possibly my lord's current condition is splendid, in which case it may be possible that the amount of magic power will increase on its own."

"If that's true...It's not bad."

My cheat ability isn't that strong.

Even if it has war potential, the fatal thing above all else is that I do not have the power to fight myself.

No matter how strong an army I collect, essentially I am a weak point that will likely be taken advantage of.

This discovery held the possibility that the weak point of my cheat ability can be buried.

After a really long time, I remembered the feeling of being excited.

"Would you like to immediately return to ask Lily to teach you magic?"

Originally this was not an option as I didn't have the talent for magic. I'd rather swing a sword and train my body.

However, the situation has changed now.

If my attainments rose somewhat, I might have to move in the direction that made best use of it.

"If I do that I would regret spending so long in this place without noticing"

Though it was true to my feelings, it might have been a mistake to put it into words.

"If I noticed a little sooner mine lord may have started a little earlier. ... Ah, no. Well."

After she says so, Gerbera lowered her eyebrows as she noticed something.

"This is my fault."

"..."

It's because it would be inconvenient if I was stopped from going out that I didn't talk to anyone about the unusual things which had been occurring.

I cannot deny that Gerbera is part of the reason for this.

But, that is that and she has no need to be concerned with this matter.

"It isn't your fault in particular."

I patted the Gerbera's pure white head who had drooped her shoulders feeling despondent.

"My lord..."

"The things I did only upset you. To say it properly, it is something like my selfishness."

In fact it comes down to me lying to my comrades as well as various other intertwining factors.

This too may not be a good thing.

However, the recent situation has changed huh.

No. I will change.

I must change.

My own personal problems and my female family members' problems too.

I will settle everything.

I have to do that.

I should do that.

For I, who will be leading the girls, that is my responsibility...

"Umu?"

And at that time.

Gabera who sent me an earnest look, frowned her eyebrows.

"—My lord!"

流石に超一流の戦闘屋だけあって、切り替えは一瞬だった。

As one would expect from the super first class battle shop, the change is instant. (TN: Yes, he really called her a battle shop that's not a typo.)

The atmosphere becomes tingly and tense.

When I follow Gabera's glance , I half rose to my feet. In order to successfully pull off such reflexive movements, it may be that I've gotten used to it.

My eye caught the shadow of an animal beyond the trees of the forest.

I see it suddenly and thought it might be a Fire Fang for an instant, but the shadow is too small.

There is a medium sized dog though.

"...Fox?"

Triangular ears. Balloon tail.

That is a monster which is similar to the fox in my world.

Though it was large for a fox, because I was used to seeing Fire Fang's giant forms, the fox appeared fairly small.

Naturally, there is no such thing as the the small physical stature directly

being proportional to the level of danger.

I remembered the knowledge I got at the colony.

"This guy...『Balloon Fox』!?"

At the same time when I call out the name which was given by the colony.

It sucked in air with a 'suuuuuu' and the body of the fox swelled greatly.

Like a balloon, a little while back it was a small body but it expanded right before my eyes.

The fox which became a spherical shape five times larger than it was originally, looked at us with murderous intent.

In order to intimidate the enemies, it swelled up like a pufferfish.

No, It's different. This is how the Balloon Fox attacks.

"GYAoOOO!"

The swollen body shrinks.

Together with the roar 3 orange fireballs were spat out.

"My lord!"

Gerbera carries me and jumps back.

As a result the avoided fireballs crashed into the tree behind us.

Just then the explosive flame which was curled up,

Collided into the trees, broke and burst into flames.

Gerbera immediately discarded the『luggage』for evasion—the cocoon wrapped monster receives the aftershock of the explosion and gets blown away and vanishes somewhere.

In particular, the rough rabbit seems to be used as a weight to counter balance. Only after that has subsided, from the fact that it was blasted away, I can see that the explosive power added into the fireball is not normal.

"...We've encountered a terrible fox fire."

Although I had heard her words, it is rather absurd.

The flame that the Balloon Fox spits out is accompanied with a physical shock.

That was a consequence of compressing the air and heating it up. Although the temperature is lower compared the flame spat by Fire Fangs, the power can't be compared.

"Fear not. This is not an opponent for me."

Gerbera spoke words of encouragement after sensing the fear born by my mind.

What she says is reasonable.

Spending two or three seconds preparing preparing to attack is not necessary for Gerbera.

Just now, I did not prepare my stance, just in case we chose to run but if it's now, it is possible that we may take action before the fox spits out the fireball.

Actually, she would crush it instantly if the Balloon Fox chose to attack.

"Mu?"

However, that did not happen.

As soon as the Balloon Fox saw that it's first attack was evaded, it curled up its tail and ran away

That.. was a splendid decision.

....But this is not a situation to praise it.

"It has run away!"

" I understand! Let's go, my lord!"

If my memories serves me right, Balloon Fox are the same as Fire Fang, they are the type of monsters who tend to form packs together.

The chances of it running away to where others were is quite high.

We began pursuing the Balloon Fox which had escaped as we made arrangements as we had done with yesterday's Fire Fang.

Chapter 07: The Tyranny Begins Once Again

The escaping balloon fox seemed somewhat faster than the Fire Fang that we chased yesterday.

Or perhaps I should say that this one is nimble

Along with it's tiny physique, it is also flexible. We may win against a Fire Fang if we go for a direct approach. But if we are in the forest with lots of obstacles, we need tactics against this Balloon Fox.

That said, it makes little difference. It is not enough to escape from Gerbera.

"...it doth not join up with its allies"

After chasing it for a few minutes, Gerbera muttered to herself.

"maybe it's a stray?"

While I'm being careful not to bite my tongue, I whispered to the beautiful face of Gerbera which was literally right in front of my eyes.

"Might very well be possible"

Closing the distance to my face to 3 centimeters, Gerbera replied in a whisper.

"If we were to chase it any further than this, it will be meaningless."

"Yeah, it might be good soon. If there is another chance, will you trap it for me?"

"Understood...However, because I'm advancing through the bushes, it will be difficult to catch it with my spider thread and also because I'm carrying my lord, I can't increase my speed....huh?"

Gerbera nodded to my request when suddenly she raised one of her eyebrows.

"Damn!"

Her red eyes narrowed.

"That whelp! It's a blunder. He has exited into a wide open area."

Just as Gerbera said, I could see a clearing in the forest a few dozen meters ahead.

When I was exploring through the forest, occasionally I ran into places like these.

The wideness is roughly about 10 meters wide huh. Like an elliptical shape opened up gaping wide in the forest.

While, there's a little undergrowth, with just a glimpse we can see that the ground is reddish-brown.

Perhaps, a forest fire happened recently.

During the one second spent thinking that, Gerbera and I reached the area.

At the same moment Gerbera exited the forest, the Balloon Fox entered the bushes

"I won't let you escape!"

Despite having the handicap of carrying me along, Gerbera nimbly jumped into the clearing without having so much as a single splinter touch me.

And that was what triggered the danger.

* * *

...Let's talk about one of the assumptions here.

In order to improve the efficiency of the monster encounters, we moved along the line of "Attack groups". This was our method.

If I was talking about this to someone else, what would happen?

If I were to tell Lily, she would definitely come here worried.

If I were to tell Rose, I would definitely be completely opposed and will not come here in the first place.

And if I were to consult with Kato, she will definitely have noticed the trap that I'm unable to detect.

That way, at the very least we could've avoided the disaster that now follows.

For me falling down dangerously into a trap, I have personally recognized it.

I previously had considered this scenario...

——If it's normal monsters, they are not worthy opponents for Gerbera. If they were rare monsters and above, they are within my ability. In any case, if there is a threat, it will only be the high monsters and they are not likely to be encountered.....

This is not wrong.

However, I had forgotten to consider one factor into my calculations.

I'm getting carried. I believe that's a fatal element.

This itself is the greatest weakness of my cheat ability. I intended to be fully aware of this.

However, I was still being naive.

It does not mean that I had forgotten but my consideration was insufficient. My thinking is insufficient.

... No. I do not have the time to just think.

I need to resolve the ill feelings between Gerbera and Rose.

My unfulfilled promise with Kato.

In addition to the various other things I understood and didn't understand

There are countless things I can't afford to not think about which cannot be resolved in the span of a single day.

Because of this it was inevitable for some things to be overlooked.

The fact that last night I didn't notice the dismembered corpse at all until Kato pointed it out to me may be one example of this.

I've concluded that for me right now it's unthinkable to exceed Gerbera in combat ability.

Although I wasn't mistaken in this, having stopped thinking at that point was a mistake.

Certainly the white Arachne boasts an overwhelming power.

No matter what monster from this forest, attacking and winning with a frontal attack would be difficult.

But, one mustn't think 'whatever happens it'll be alright'.

After all, she's only one person.

Although it's obvious, us humans can only hold onto what we can carry with our 2 arms, and can only support what our 2 legs can hold upright.

In Gerbera's case it may be 8 legs, but the fact remains that there's a limit to what one can do.

It's common to say 'there's a limit to what a single person can do'.

"...Wha!?"

I opened my eyes wide.

The Balloon Fox that we were chasing ran into the underbrush. Suddenly, a different one which was already greatly inflated appeared from there.

The number of them which had surrounded us after we arrived in the middle of the clearing easily numbered over 30.

And then I realized it.

What I really should be mindful of is not encountering powerful monsters, but instead encountering an amount of monsters that Gerbera can't all hold back on her own.

At this moment, the relationship between the hunter and the hunted was reversed.

By the time I regretted my own thoughtlessness, the trigger was already pulled.

"UaAaAA!?"

Over a hundred fireballs came flooding towards us.

It was like a surging wall of flames heading towards us.

It came from 360 degrees around us with no place left to run.

In contrast to the red flames, I felt surrounded by the darkness of despair.

There's no way to phrase it other than to say we were careless.

Although the monsters don't have the emotions or the will of a human, they possess a keen intellect on the level of an animal.

Back on earth, hunting in a pack was a common tactic of wolves, lions, hyenas etcetera.

It's not strange then that the monsters would use a similar method.

The clearing in this forest then was nothing but an execution ground for we who were lured here.

....it's already hopeless.

I really believed that so strongly I already started to see my life flash before my eyes.

But, at that moment.

Gerbera who was still carrying me let out a yell full of fighting spirit.

"As if I shall let thee!"

Gerbera waved her hand and brandished a bunch of spider threads like a whip.

Almost unconsciously my line of sight followed where Gerbera's hand swung.

I looked over and there was an approaching fireball.

The spider webs which cracked like a whip, danced and crashed into some of the fireballs which had come flying.

I remembered the destruction of the trees from the explosion of the fireball used by the Balloon Fox just a little ago.

When the Balloon Fox's fireball strikes something solid it explodes.

Not to mention when it hits a spider thread swung down with the full might of a High Monster.

–You should blow it up first if you can't evade it.

This must have been Gerbera's thoughts.

The fireballs hit by the spider thread explode in the air one after another.

It is an extremely violent decision and at the same time it was the only way to avoid them.

The explosion occurred only several meters away at most. It is better than than being caught up in the explosion directly and naturally the hot wind surges by.

Gerbera held me tightly to her chest using her body as a shield to protect me, but none the less the heat wave baked my skin without mercy.

The only thing I could do was close my eyes and endure.

My scream in the midst of the roar doesn't even reach my own ears.

Endure. Endure.

The moment of the wind blowing past felt like several minutes.

And like that the blast past through my skin.

Half passed out I barely heard Gerbera's voice.

"It's not over master!"

Faster than I could think—What?—the situation changed.

"Uu,aAaAaaAa!?"

Before I could understand what was going on, I was surrounded by heat that flared up.

Some fireballs were burst with the spider string and Gerbera moved into the lower density area whilst carrying me.

The ground where a compressed fireball exploded was heated up and the air was still quite hot.

It is fortunate that Gerbera's jumping power is so great that the rush and withdrawal were almost instant.

At almost the same time, a large explosion occurred from behind.

Opening my closed eyes I witness a rising red flame.

A great number of fireballs spat by the Balloon Foxes struck the ground where we just an instant ago and they exploded all at once.

I shivered.

If Gerbera's decision had been even a moment slower we would have been in the middle of that explosion.

Perhaps I was only able to survive because of Gerbera.

But I who was with her could not get away with that.

It's doubtful whether or not a corpse was needed to stop the pattern.

Even during the current withdrawal, I was suffering considerable burns to my face, hands and feet.

If I didn't have the clothes made by Gerbera before we departed, maybe I would have died of shock from burns across my whole body.

"Let's withdraw!"

Gerbera shouts out desperately as she jumps repeatedly.

Twice, thrice.

She jumps and tries to escape from the pack of Balloon Foxes.

Gerbera had her body bent low for the third jump...However the claw on her spider leg stabbed into the ground causing her to rapidly break.

She could not help doing so.

"Impossible...It cannot be"

The groan as she spat blood wasn't suitable for her.

When I caught sight of what left her at a loss for word I also became doubtful.

Innumerable huge lilies (TN: The actual flower) hung down from the trees and bloomed.

It was a monster I knew which looked like a vine.

Because the monster I hunted as a gift for Lily yesterday was this monster...it was a Gun Vine.

The Gun Vine is a parasitic monster that take nourishment from trees and aggressively attacks animals.

Gerbera was fleeing while carrying me with her and stumbled into a place filled with Gun Vines.

The reaction was fierce.

The weapon of the Gun Vine—the origin of it's name, innumerable seed like bullets fired from the lily like flower.

I was only able to feel the first bullet that shot into the back of my left hand.

It's already the aftershock.

"GAa, Ah! aA!"

I got hit on the shoulder, in the stomach and blood gushed out of my thigh.

Maybe it was fortunate that my body was half paralyzed a short while ago and I couldn't properly feel the pain.

Aside from that it's a terrible misfortune however.

No, maybe it's more appropriate to say that this kind of『Luck is Bad』.

Because the reason why I think『I'm unlucky to come into a colony of Gun Vines during an escape』is that I misunderstand the problem.

No matter how bad my luck is this can't be coincidence.

This is naturally included as part of the Balloon Foxes certain kill trap.

It was the result of Gerbera's choice that the escape route lead to a colony of Gun Vines. It's probably the direction which she had the highest probability of escaping—in other words she should have broken through where the Balloon Foxes enclosure was thinnest.

That trap was placed there.

It seems that the Balloon Foxes have teamed up with the Gun Vines.

Unlike the Monster A.I. in a RPG game, this worlds Monster don't rush straightforwardly into combat.

Although, in this 『cooperation』I don't know which party is the one being used.

Such is the nature.

In this deadly situation, I'm moments away from death, of that I am certain.

It is very likely, that for weak monsters like Balloon Foxes to survive in the forest they had formed groups.

I don't know how many hits Gerbera received nor do I know how many she had taken for me.

She desperately tried to protect me from taking any fatal attack, such as to the head.

But it was futile.

The surroundings are filled with Gun Vines again.

A flock of Balloon Foxes are approaching from the rear.

I manage to endure the attack, and Gerbera is barely able to protect me in time.

It is praiseworthy that I am able to survive up until now, this fight is more than I could handle.

My consciousness begins to fade, I ready myself for death.

However.

"Doeth....not jest"

" "

Once again Gerbera had regressed.

Possibly, to giving in to her rage..... this way of living is how she must have survived for all those years. And perhaps, that is how she came to be a High Monster.

Similar to the time Kato demolished her immature logic, she has lost all reason.

She had become that sort of Monster, with the same low level emotional intelligence of a wild animal. The Balloon Fox was unprepared

for her devastating attack.

"Doeth not jest!"

Gerbera cries out as to repel the inevitable future, as if to hold my soul in place..... as it tries to leave my body.

As soon as she had the chance, she sheltered the fallen me with the spider form of her lower body.

" ... "

I lied down on my back and looked towards the sky.

The reflected figure of the white arachne, High Monster, can be seen in my eyes.

For far too long she had been alone, and lonely.

She has always fought alone.

She is not used to protecting someone else while fighting.

Her true battle prowess is shown.

Now her fetter had been secured and she is free to do as she pleases.

Without missing a cue, Gerbera began her offensive assault. In a split second she has caught up to a Balloon Fox and the Gun Vine who were charging up for their next attack.

“Never again! Tis my fault! I’m about to allow my lord to perish!J

Now that both her hands are free, she is able to use the full potential of her spider thread. The thread is scattered all over the place.

Trees, Monster, even unrelated objects.

Because she didn’t aim, her accuracy is off, but she didn’t care.

It wasn’t necessary.

Her spider web indiscriminately clung to everything, except me, who was hidden beneath her.

“AaAaaaAAAAA!”

The girl’s blood curdling scream causes the forest to shiver.

Gerbera’s eight legs fumbled at the ground.

Her claws pierced deeply into the ground, fixing Gerbera’s body into place.

And the terror of the white monster had arrived.

What Gerbera did is a simple feat, 『she merely used her spider thread』.

However, these simple acts of raw power are purely monstrous and only a true monster could perform them, is that not the case?

——it was as if she had become the center of the world, the scene was just that dramatic.

The eyes of all who are present focus on the white spider who is releasing a tremendous killing intent. A tree is yanked out of the ground and then many other trees are sent flying, a thunderous roaring collision of smashing trees can be heard. The Gun Vine that happen to be caught up in the crossfire was torn apart and flattened, while the Balloon Fox had dodged by rolling away.

Everything was gathered up by the spider-girl's threads and rolled into a ball.

All that had been caught is bound together and crushed.

Each and every thing was hurled into the the air and collided together.

A shower of fragmented wreckage rained down from the sky like snowflakes.

Nothing remained. Its original form had dispersed.

Despite the circumstances, I couldn't help but want to laugh.

How irresponsible.

.....to have failed even though our forces are more capable. I messed-up, this is completely my blunder.

How pathetic.

Haven't I failed them as a Master?

I'm so ashamed I want to die.

In the situation where it appears I could die if left alone it's a foolish thing to think about.

"My Lord!"

Nevertheless, I can't die now.

This life is no longer my own, I have to protect Lily and Rose. And Gerbera is still desperately trying to save me.

I have a reason to live.

「I'll bring thee to Lily-dono immediately! Don't lose heart!」

Blood gushes from every area of my body.

My skin is burnt away, leaving scorched darkened red blisters.

Every inch of his ruined body is covered in wounds.

Will I..... die?

Compared to the time when I was alone, what death means to me now is completely different from before. Is what I thought.

As Gerbera makes her way through the forest, she carries me in her arms. I could only helplessly struggle to stay alive.

Chapter 08: The way sisters should be

Gerbera promptly carried me under her arms and headed straight for her nest.

All the way my consciousness was faint.

Perhaps due to my burns I didn't feel much pain.

Without meeting any monsters on the way, the white arachne returned me to the nest at full speed.

"Master!?"

"S.. senpai!"

Rose turned around and screamed in a particularly unladylike manner, while Kato's face turned pale.

"Master!"

Lily jumped up and snatched me away.

I was laid to rest face up on a bed.

They tore off my armor and removed my bloodstained clothes.

Lily took a moment to catch her breath.

Or possibly, she swallowed a scream welling up inside of her.

Right after, a white light came from her hand.

It was healing magic.

The flow of blood hemorrhaging from the bullet wounds slowed down.

As expected of magic. I calmed down and surrendered myself to the warm light.

....or that's what I would've done if I could.

"aAaA,AAh, GAAaAA!?"

As the medical treatment was progressing, the nerves that were previously stunned now came alive again.

Despite this, my wounds were still far from fully healed.

Although basic healing magic includes an analgesic effect to some extent, my current situation is far beyond what it can cover up.

Obviously, since advanced sedatives don't exist here I have no choice but to clench my teeth and bare with it.

Kato was shouting something.

Lilly inserted her finger into my mouth. So that I wouldn't bite my tongue she pressed it down locking it to my jaw.

Now it was Lily who shouted.

My body was being pinned down by hard slippery legs. While my body was writhing in pain Rose must be suppressing me.

Only Gerbera's voice could not be heard.

I wonder where she went off to.

A part of my mind that was desperately trying to escape the pain was constantly thinking such things.

"Healing magic can somehow deal with the burns, but the pellets that were shot inside..."

I heard Lilly's heartbreaking voice.

For some reason they were arguing back and forth.

Because I mostly regressed into an animal-like state I had lost the ability to understand their words.

Right now I have nothing left. Nothing but pain.

"...Rose, give me a knife."

My ears were picking up sounds.

But I understood no meaning from them.

I didn't want to understand.

"I'm sorry, Master".

Foreign matter... body... inside...

“UgoOh, UuOGAh, AaA!!”

It hurts... it hurts, ithurtsithurtsithurtsithurtsithuuuurts!

Waves of pain were slamming into my brain.

If this can still be called pain then what the hell did I feel up till now?

At this point I can't believe this is anything other than something created to destroy my very being.

With my impaired body in excruciating agony all I could do was writhe around.

My restrained teeth were biting into Lilly's skin which mimics that of a young girl. It looked like they were almost torn off entirely.

Her finger melted into the flexible body tissue of a slime and kept my teeth from breaking.

Every time the pain wrecked through my body like an electric shock, my body moved around unnaturally.

A pair of puppet arms were creaking while trying to restrain my own arms, which were flailing around by reflex.

Although my flesh was getting covered in bruises my body was jumping around by itself.

Stomach, shoulder, clavicle, flanks, thighs.

One after another pellets were getting scattered around the bed with damp sounds.

My time in hell went on.

This is the price I pay for my foolishness.

I'd nearly rather lose consciousness, but I understood how bad that would be.

It's like sailors caught in a storm. The moment their hands let go it's all over. Sinking in the darkness, never to come up again.

I could do nothing but earnestly hold on.

I wonder how much time has passed by now.

By the time I couldn't recognize pain anymore as being pain the operation smelling of blood came to an end.

I received healing magic again.

Magic is the greatest. Without this I've no idea how many times I would've died.

"Why did this...!?"

It took a long time for me to recover from being reduced to a state similar to an animal.

"All the pellets were removed. The wounds all healed up, and even the burns..."

I could sense the white light of healing magic through my closed

eyelids.

The pain from my wounds has gone away.

However, my body felt bizarrely languid.

It's obvious that the body will be sore after strenuous activity. My body felt the danger of coming so close to death, although I don't remember it well.

Feeling exhausted is obviously to be expected. However... I get the feeling this dull feeling isn't just caused by fatigue.

Fundamentally speaking, it feels like something came out of my body and went missing.

It feels like there's still something coming out.

To give an example, I feel like a container with a hole in the bottom.

Because of this I can't put strength into any part of my body.

I can't even make the tip of my finger twitch.

On top of that a white mist was approaching me on the edge of my consciousness.

If I were to pass out now, I would never wake up again. Such a feeling hadn't left me even now.

I wonder if this means that the wounds I received were just that severe.

I understand that healing magic is by no means omnipotent.

Even Lilly had to recover for days. Moreover, there's no treatment

possible if you die.

Perhaps my body exceeded this limit.

If that's so, will I die like this after all?

... I don't want to die.

I can't allow myself to die here.

After all, I still haven't...

"... 'tis mine fault"

Only now did I hear Gerbera's voice

I felt like it had been quite a while since I heard her.

I slowly opened my eyes.

Even just that took a lot of effort for me now.

Only a narrow field of view opens up to me.

Lilly and Rose were beside me.

Lilly's hand had reformed and she thrust it into my mouth again. Her other hand was glowing with healing magic and placed near my chest.

Rose should have been straddling my waist earlier but now she's sitting at my right hand side. She looks ready to restrain me the moment I go wild again.

I also saw Kato who had a stiff expression on her face and her hand on Rose's shoulder.

...Gerbera, where is she?

While only being able to move my eyes I looked for her.

I found her right away.

She sat on a different bed about 3 meters away, with her 8 legs folded and overall looking very dejected.

“Tis all... mine fault.”

Her drooping shoulders made her look crestfallen

Her face is normally white as it is, but now it looked like bleached paper.

“... Could you explain the circumstances?”, Lily asked.

There was no way to tell what she was thinking from her tightly controlled voice or the expression on her face. Right now, even I don't have the composure to face her head on.

“We...”

Gerbera obediently began to talk about what had happened.

About how we started an investigation together. What we were trying to do, the discussion between us. How we weren't able to find any family members, looking for different measures, thinking there has to be a water source because of the many monsters. Taking on the herd, thinking it would go well but having it turn into a disaster...

In summary, her recollection was the same as mine.

Except for one thing which was decisively different.

"...everything was my fault"

She was crouching down while holding her white head in her hands.

"I couldn't change after all. I can't change mine inborn nature. In the end I brought calamity upon our lord."

She feels obligated to take responsibility.

Having me get injured is now part of history which she can't wipe away.

Because of that she's now tormented by some form of trauma.

"How foolish. I shouldst hast known! If I am together with all of thou 'tis certain thou will all come to regret it sooner 'r later. . . !"

I made a lot of plans for her sake. If I didn't have her battle power on my side there's no way I would have challenged the herd of monsters.

With this way of looking at it it's possible to say it was Gerbera's fault.

But even with this viewpoint the one who failed was ultimately myself.

Gerbera really did very well.

The fact that I can still draw breath even now is without a doubt a result of her efforts.

There isn't even a fragment of a reason for her to feel responsible for what happened. I got hurt because of what I did by myself, so she's absolutely wrong about this.

However, at least within her heart that was the truth.

"I shouldst hast nev'r been beside him in the first place."

Gerbera sank into depression, and with that my scheme collapsed as well.

I intended for her to make up for her earlier mistakes so that Rose would acknowledge her.

Instead, rather than making any sort of recovery we got ourselves in this mess.

Whatever the reason may be, it's a fact that she couldn't protect me.

Because of me her list of mistakes has only piled up further.

Although she's depressed like that I can't even call out to her with my body in this state.

I can't even make any excuses for her sake like this.

Even when I'm about to lose something important to me, I can't do anything but witness it.

... ah, shit.

Why did it have to end up like this.

It's not like I made a move without thinking it through.

I didn't go in optimistically with a half-playful mindset.

I thought it would be okay if I first thought about what I would do and then worried about it for a while.

But I ended up overlooking everything important, I did my best but in the end everything turned into a massive failure.

I went through such pain, almost died and it still seems like I might die anyway.

And finally I'm about to lose something so important.

Really, I wonder why.

If I could have gotten along well with everyone I would've been satisfied with just that.

"Gerbera"

At that point, a calm voice called out her name.

It was Lily's, though I didn't realize it at first.

She had calmed down to that extent. Although I was in this state before her, she's fully composed.

Her pretty teeth lightly chewed her glossy lips, but she maintained a calm face.

Maybe she's deliberately smoothed out her composure. It could be pure mimicry. After all, she's that sort of being and she excels at showing others what she wants.

However, if that's true she's surely bottling up her feelings inside herself.

"You said it was your fault Master got injured?"

Lily's tone of voice was a bit lower than usual.

"And that because of this you shouldn't be beside him?"

The feeling she tried to repress leaked out a little at the end of that sentence.

That was definitely anger.

Lily was silently angry.

However, it didn't seem that anger was directed at my getting hurt.

"Do you think that's what Master wishes for? What do you think Master went to such lengths for? Do you mean to throw out his feeling just like that?"

Lily got angry at Gerbera for taking the blame upon herself.

"But, I..."

"'But' nothing. You don't understand anything. Really, you don't get it at all. Masters feelings or our feelings...!"

Lily shook her head and directed a withering glare at Gerbera.

"Listen Gerbera. Before you became one of our comrades you, the white arachne, taught me something.

"I did?"

"Yeah. That was that I lacked strength. Both Mentally and physically and I also lacked experience. I understood very well then that I couldn't help Master by myself. To the point of really hating it, you know."

Rather than saying she was 'taught' it's probably more appropriate to say she had the facts thrown in her face.

Her voice sounded bitter, but she bravely faced her own shortcoming.

"but, at that point we realized we had to join forces. Probably, all of us in this household lack in some parts and that's just the sort of beings we are. That's why, if we don't work together as sisters and complement one another it'll surely be hopeless."

Lily's voice seemed to have recovered.

Probably, her answer to the problem already came out from within her.

"I'm Master's first family member. Therefore you could say I'm something like Master's eldest daughter. Because of that I've decided to become someone worthy of that role.

Seeing her make such a proud statement with her chest held high, She seemed quite a bit more impressive than how I remember her.

"Even if I'm not a reliable older sister, I would certainly never reject or

abandon my younger sister."

"Lily-dono..."

"No matter how you feel about yourself, I don't care about that at all."

So it turns out that Lily had already fully accepted Gerbera from the beginning, even though she had gotten me injured.

I found myself wondering about how that ever happened.

"I want you to support Master as well. I thought that way before and still do so even now."

"Nevertheless"

Although she had held her tongue and listened intently, she now began speaking.

"Yea together with Lily-dono, what assistance doth thou believe I couldst provide f'r my lord in this state?"

Unlike Lilly who can use healing magic, Gerbera has no skills to heal wounds sustained in battle.

"There is not a thing I can do. If there wast I would ha' made sure things went differently. What art thou saying to someone who couldst not protect him"

"No, there is something you can do".

With slightly downcast eyes Lily denied her words.

Despite looking so resolute before, now she almost had an apologetic look on her face.

"In fact, it might be something that only you can do."

"A thing only I can do? Doth such a thing exist?"

With a nod Lilly looked in my direction.

"As you can see Master has lost his energy. Do you have any idea why that is, Gerbera?"

"I would presume 'tis because he sustain'd great injury. I heard humans to be weak beings."

"Yeah, that's normally correct. But, in this case it's not like that."

Gerbera had a puzzled frown on the face.

"What doth thou mean?"

"Within me lie the memories of a human called Miho Mizushima. I also have the memories of my life as a monster up till now. Because of this I can say that Master's condition isn't normal."

"Not normal? What dost thou mean specifically?"

"Master's wounds have long since been healed. My healing magic was certainly effective. Since he made it this far he should be fine already."

Gerbera's expression turned increasingly baffled.

"But, My lords countenance hast become paler by the moment, hath it not?"

"Yeah. That's why there has to be a different reason for his weakening. I also know what this reason is, but I don't know 'why' this has happened."

"Ay?"

"Master's body no longer has sufficient magical energy."

As Lily frankly stated thus, I stared at Gerbera.

"Gerbera, don't divert your eyes and look carefully. You should surely understand."

Gerbera gave a start as Lilly pointed it out to her. Up till now she had been trying to look away.

Urged on by Lily, she now timidly turned her eyes straight at me.

"...Certainly, it doth seem My lord's magical energy is running out."

Gerbera narrowed her red eyes and muttered while looking at me.

Earlier Gerbera was able to see the increase in my magical power and also the cause of this, and Lily investigated it herself as well. I'm sure that the fact I'm losing my magic power is guaranteed.

Lily nodded and opened her mouth.

"All living beings in this word possess magical power to some extent.

Monsters have a particularly large amount of magic power, but any creature is endowed with magic. Although I'm not sure why but people from a different world like Master also seem to have magical power, but that doesn't mean they have a cheat-like ability for it, right? If anyone can use magic then everyone has magic power after all."

Lily cut her words short and paused for a moment.

"Well, those things don't matter much now. The problem at hand is that the lack of magical energy is causing abnormal effects. It probably is obvious that it would. For example, in my case I would lose control of my form and Rose would stop being able to move. I don't know the effect it would have on any or all living beings, but it does look like even people from a different world are affected in a bad way."

"...I have understood what thou meanst to say"

Gerbera had a difficult expression after coming to understand the circumstances.

"But, what wouldst thou suggest I do? As the cause remainst unknown no cure is possible."

"True, a real cure is impossible. Without knowing the cause investigating a cure would be hard. However, we may be able to try symptomatic therapy."

"Symptomatic therapy?"

"Yeah. I want you to share some of your magic power with Master"

Gerbera opened her red eyes wide upon hearing Lilly's request.

"My magic power, thou sayeth"?

"If I were to say to imagine a blood transfusion... you probably wouldn't get it. Ehm, basically, Magic has a path through which magic power flows, right? Through it magic power was channeled so it could be increased. Therefore, should it not be possible to share magic power deliberately this way?

"Lily, if I may."

Kato interjected.

"To me the example of a blood transfusion is easy to understand. Because of this I have to ask whether or not we have to worry about something like an incompatibility in blood type?"

Kato had a poor complexion, but she remained calm enough to point out the risks in the treatment.

"I understand what you mean, but it will be all right."

Lily's eyes glimpsed towards Kato.

"... I think. Master has already accepted Gerbera's magic before so I would estimate the chances of complications to be low."

"And what shall we do once problems do showeth themselves!"

Gerbera almost screamed.

No wonder. Lily's thinking is merely conjecture. A poorly executed

transfusion can result in death too.

"I understand where you're coming from. I'm scared of what could go wrong as well. However, I don't need to say what would happen if we do nothing, right?"

I would surely die in that case.

In this situation I've no choice but to take the gamble.

"No matter why, currently Master's magic is draining steadily. However, if he could be supplied with magic at the same rate..."

"Even were it possible in theory, there is way of knowing I can perform it properly! For example, what wouldst happen were I to exceed the maximum amount of power? If I... I could possibly kill him in such a way..."

"There's no choice but to believe in you."

Lily said so with a very light voice.

She was pretending to be calm on the surface.

Only the finger that still remained in my mouth trembled lightly.

"At the very least I think you're the one most suited for this. Besides, with the amount of magical energy you possess you should be able to keep it up continuously I think."

Controlling 2 attributes of magic in addition to healing magic, Lily is certainly very skilled at controlling magic, but she can't keep casting her healing magic on me continuously. Moreover, she doesn't have the large

amount of magic that Gerbera has. Although Rose can create a lot of magic power she's not as good at controlling it and Kato is completely out of the question.

Like Lily has been saying since the beginning, Gerbera is probably the only one who can pull it off.

However.

Hypothetically speaking, How many people would cut into the belly of a wounded person even if they know not doing anything would spell death?

Let alone if this person is an important companion.

If you the person is important to you it'd be very hard to keep calm and collected. It's obvious that mistakes are made when you're not calm. It's the same reasoning that cause physicians to hesitate to operate on relatives.

"Fo, for one such as I to..."

possibly get me killed...

Obviously when thinking of something like that one would lose the will to move.

Yeah, it's obvious.

Then why didn't Lily expect it to end up this way?

...There's no way she didn't plan for this.

"Please, Gerbera."

Lily, who was looking straight at Gerbera, slowly lowered her head deeply.

"I'm aware you're afraid of hurting Master. I understand this act may take Master's life. I'm well aware how cruel then this request is. Nonetheless, I want to entrust this task to you."

Although she fully understood the circumstances, Lily lowered her head anyway.

What could compel her to do such a thing has already left her mouth.

"Please Gerbera. Help our Master."

"Lily-dono..."

Gerbera stared intently at Lily.

The fear of hurting me was evident within her eyes, but when the flaxen hair on Lilly's lowered head got reflected in her pupils the fear gradually melts away.

Gerbera was fearful of solitude by nature and her feelings of 'wanting to become a comrade' are unusually strong.

Lily's sincere words had a large effect on her because of that.

Finally, the weakness left Gerbera's noble features and were replaced by a strong will.

Slowly, her long white hair swung up and down.

"...Understood."

"Gerbera!"

Lily raised her head with a joyful voice.

Gerbera replied with a clumsy smile on her gentle face.

"Leave it to me."

The crouching spider unfolded her legs.

Gerbera got up and started moving towards me on 8 legs.

3 meters. 2 meters.

The distance between us had disappeared.

"..."

However, what was supposed to be a resolute gait suddenly turned a little clumsy.

The cause of this was obvious.

"...Rose-dono"

Although she should have calmed down now, Gerbera's fear suddenly

rose up again.

Since Rose is so devoted to me it's only natural that she would object.

What would she think at this important point, what would she say.
Gerbera probably can't help but think about such things.

As expected.

"...What are you doing?"

Rose asked with featureless face.

"Please share your magic with Master quickly."

"Eh?"

Gerbera let out a foolish voice.

Without understanding what was just said she blinked a few times.
She must feel anti-climactic after putting her guard up.

I felt the same way.

"Wouldst that be all right?"

"Would what be?"

"Doth thee not distrust me?"

" ... "

Rose kept silent at this question.

She didn't seem to be displeased but rather looked like she was thinking about what to say.

But Rose wasn't silent for very long.

Perhaps she had been thinking about her relationship with Gerbera all the time up till now.

"Lily-anesama said the same thing earlier, so I'm just repeating it. Or rather, I'll go back to something we discussed before that."

Rose prefaced her argument like that.

"Earlier, you said that Master got hurt because of you. Isn't that right?"

"a, aye..."

"My apologies to Lily-anesama for saying so, but I agree."

Gerbera looked like she was about to cry from Rose's gaze.

It seemed like she thought Rose would never accept her.

But, she was jumping to a conclusion.

"However, the same could be said about me."

Like this, Rose continued.

"No. In fact my own responsibility weighs far more heavily. I couldn't approve of you. I couldn't accept you. My frank honesty and my obstinacy has led to these circumstances."

"N, No. Even my lord believed thou wouldst not approve of me."

"Be that as it may, This is the result and I can't make excuses for that. At the very least, condemning you would be barking up the wrong tree. Stubbornly causing another mistake despite all this would be mere foolishness."

after saying this much, Rose shook her head.

"No, that's still somewhat deceptive. I need to convey it without killing my heart."

Rose looked like she convinced herself. She turned her face to Kato who still had her hand on her shoulder and then looked back at Gerbera again.

"Gerbera. I won't be able to come to like you. Due to a 'certain event' I've somehow come to understand what you were trying to accomplish a little. Because I too have something I must accomplish, now I can appreciate where you're coming from. That doesn't change that I have poor compatibility with you though. That Master got injured because of such reasons, even now I remember the anger I have for you. However..."

It seemed like Rose took a brief moment to turn her attention to the feelings inside her, and told Gerbera how she really felt.

"Nevertheless, you are my little sister."

"Rose-dono..."

Gerbera's red eyes went wide.

"In the same way I'm also the sister of Lily-anesama. It's not like I feel I need to accept you just because Master accepted you, but rather that the feelings of wanting to accept you as a sister aren't entirely absent within me."

Rose, who usually kills off her own emotions, is now dealing with her complicated feelings towards Gerbera... when I think about it this might be the first time for that to happen.

Coincidentally, there existed an easy to understand phrase with which a compromise between the two could be expressed.

"Regarding Master, please let's get along well"

Lowering her head, Rose withdrew her body as though yielding the way to Gerbera.

Maybe a chance for the two of them to compromise like this was necessary. That this chance had to take this form can only be called particularly rotten luck.

There is no doubt however that the two were able to resolve some of the ill feelings between them. I should consider that a blessing at least.

"My lord"

Like that Gerbera came up to my bedside.

There was no weakness apparent on her face.

I understood that Lily's and Rose's words supported her back.

"Please, entrust thine body to me."

White threads were hanging from all five of her fingers on both hands.

Various places all over my body were connected with her fingers.

"I shall begin."

Saying so, Gerbera began flowing magic energy through the spider threads.

From her sleek fingers a white radiance appeared, which flowed down the threads and circulated throughout my body.

The thing that previously felt lacking, as if flowing out of me now felt like it was being compensated for.

My whole body trembled. It was the first time I've ever really experienced the true feeling of magical energy.

Gerbera was immersed in her work with the expression of sincerity itself.

Lily and Rose watched over her in response to the hope they put into their gamble.

...I'm sure it'll be fine, now.

Just as I thought that, I lost the tension in my body.

Drowsiness closed in on my consciousness like surging waves.

Without being able to see it through till the end, I finally lost my awareness.

Chapter 09: Way Of The Master

It was the next day that I woke up.

Fortunately, the continuous decrease of my magic power has stabilized after a day. It is not certain since the cause of the phenomenon was unclear to begin with, but it seems I can be relieved for the time being.

From what I heard, Gerbera was at my side the whole time giving me magic power until my condition stabilized.

Even with Gerbera's persistent stubbornness, she endured the task of providing me magical power through sheer willpower. After ensuring my safety, she passed out and fell asleep.

Speaking of which, she did mention she was poor at treatment of magic power.

I have really troubled her.

「Good work today」

When I patted her white head, her spider legs made a grinding sound.*Kichikichi*

I was charmed by the smile which appeared on her soft pretty face which was that of a person who had completed their task.

* * *

「We were saved this time.」

I called out to Lily who was in the rear.

The two of us moved to a small room installed in the Arachne's nest.

It was a『bathroom』built by Rose whilst we were away. Even though it was only 『a partitioned space with a bucket wide enough for a person to enter』.

In an isolated place with nobody else.

It has been a long time since Lily and I got our alone time.

「Although it is related to my treatment, I was saved despite the issue with Gerbera. If Lily was not around, what would have happened... Sorry for the trouble we put you through.」

「It's ok, there's no such thing.」

Lily responded to my apology with a wry smile and she sat in front of me and *JAKIRI* cut my hair with the scissors Rose made.

After a month of surviving in the wild, my hair has gotten longer. A portion of it however is uneven due to it getting burned from the fireball of a Balloon Fox.

I asked Lily to trim the hair back evenly. After all, I am fine even if I were to have it cut at a cheap barber shop. Letting an amateur cut it won't leave any dissatisfaction. As long as it is not ugly, I am fine with it.

「Although I had said it previously, I am everyone's older sister. So that's

just a natural thing for me to do.」

「Is that so? That reminded me, you had said that previously.」

「Rather, I want you to praise Rose. In that way, it's unexpected that Garbera can be accepted that easily.」

「Ah, I thought it would take more time. Possibly, I was worried the relationship between the two would break because Gerbera didn't manage to protect me.」

「I also had the same opinion. I thought that child would be more stubborn. However, Rose has also thought about Gabera in her own way, right?」

「Yeah, you are right.」

「Certainly, Gerbera had also worked hard. She definitely fought bravely until now. 」

While chatting, the hair cut by Lily fell to my towel covered waist.

In this way, with me being semi nude, I can consider taking this opportunity to wash off all the dirt and sweat from my body while washing off the cut hair.

Lily is my attendant for when I take a bath.

Because my body doesn't move really well yet.

This is simply weakening from a lack of physical strength, rather than a side effect of the magic received from Gerbera.

Anyway, I feel heavy and my body doesn't move properly.

Fortunately, as for now, there are no other ill symptoms. There is no particular pain apart from the burn mark on my arm and the faint scar which remained when the metal seed vine's gun seed was taken out.

However, it might be possible that I have yet to be aware of the bad condition of my body. I must take note of the unknown reason of the loss of magic.

「That's right. I was saved by Gerbera. Lily and Rose too. It seems everyone has grown up before I knew it...」

Listening to the scissors making the smart snipping sounds, I reflexively leaked out a sigh.

「I did not notice it at all... This is proof that my vision has become narrowed.」

「That probably can't be helped.」

After evening up my hair, Lily began to *Shaki Shaki* fix the hair points with the scissors.

「My Master, I wish to know how important we are to you. The discord between Rose and Gerbera is a great problem for Master. Since it is important, the bigger the discord between Rose and Gerbera, the more issues for Master. Putting in effort only to see it for naught, I think it is normal for humans..」

「Oh, please close your eyes Master.」

When the haircut was finished, Lily began to draw water and started washing my hair.

Slender fingers tussle my hair and tickled my scalp. Water was poured on top of my head and flowed along my chin to the floor.

I kept talking while closing my eyes.

「It may be as Lily says.」

「Yes?」

「The talk about rushing to put in effort which ended up fruitless.」

Thinking back on it, I consider the situation whereby we met the enemy balloon for the first time. The careless behaviour that I exhibited which lead to us facing a group of them suddenly, is probably due to my bearing an impatient attitude at that point in time.

「I was somehow very impatient and ended up nearly dying. On the

contrary, due to me not being able to solve the discord between Gerbera and Rose, I am able to conclude the gap/misunderstanding between Gerbera and Rose. 」

After Lily cleansed my body, I submerged into the water in the tub.

Though it would be better if there was hot water, being clean is good enough.

However, the pleasure of taking a bath is halved.

「It's pathetic. Even though I'm your leader...」

Is it because my feelings loosened a little?The whine that should be kept deep in my chest was let out.

「At any time, there is no room for doubt and I am driven to the wall worrying about everyone. The plan I have is full of holes . I do not have the power to solve your problems. 」

On the brink of death due to my rapid loss of magic power, the spectacle of everything nearly coming to naught played out in front of me and I thought 『Why did it turn out to be like this?』

If you try to reconsider the chain of events that happened, the answer is clear

That is because I'm incompetent.

Lily said that my impatience and fruitless effort was 『Ordinary』.

However, being the norm is no good. This is because I am the Master of Monsters.

It is due to me not having sufficient ability, which ended up with such

mistakes and failures. Thanks to Lily and everyone, we were able to overcome this danger.

This is nothing but an afterthought. It doesn't change the fact that there is nothing that I can do.

They are certainly growing at the moment. But, I am still useless for now.

「Being impatient, moving around aimlessly. There is nothing I can do. There is nothing that I can obtain. 」

I let out a heavy sigh and feel depressed.

「Truly deplorable」

Fairy: He is scolding himself

「Master...」

Lily embraced and carried me into the bathroom, who is unable to exert any strength into my body, and peered into my eyes as I am.

She quietly gazed at me with her big eyes.

When I looked at her questioningly, she cast her eyes downwards.

It seems she's thinking about something. I wonder what's she's thinking about... I am unable to read her mind using the monster family link.

Lily looked up.

A smile as if flowers are blooming spreads throughout her face.

「As for that, I guess it can't be helped. 」

Those are kind comforting words.... or not.

There is a strange aura behind her smile

「Li-Lily...」

I felt unease and unconsciously started stepping back. But the place I am in right now is in the so-called big pail and there is no escape.

I wanted to pretend that I did not notice it but unfortunately, there exists an monster family link. between us. Lily's highly strung feeling leaked out to me. In addition, she did not intend on hiding it.

「Master, as for me. Okay. I am very angry about this incident.」

Lily with a look of protest stood up from her kneeling posture and moved closer towards me.

Without consideration of the water in the pail as she moved towards me. Her jersey got wet and she does not seem to care about it.

When I try to bend my upper body backwards, she pushes me down. With her slender arms that have strength far above that of a normal girl, she seized both my arms in order to not let me escape.

「Why don't you consult with me? Why do you hold it in yourself? Why are we not relied on?」

「Didn't rely on you? What are you talking about? There is no such thing,

is there?」

「Are you saying that I misunderstood?」

I nodded and protested.

「Without you guys, I would already be in a monster's stomach. As expected, even I understand this. 」

「I didn't think of it. Uhm... Yes, isn't it? That's right, isn't it? 」

Lily nodded easily.

A bittersweet smile floated on her face.

「It is as Master has said. Master will not view us as unreliable, right? 」

With a smile that looks slightly sad, Lily said to me.

「However, you don't rely on us.」

「...」

「Although Master has thought of us as『Reliable Companions』, I'd rather be『Companions to rely on.』」

「...」

I couldn't find any word of denial this time.

It is an unmistakable fact that I turned down Lily with all my might.

It's the same for Rose and Gerbera. Same goes for the issue with Kato-san. Although I was pampered by Gerbera once, since it became like that, I had somehow deceived them at first.. As for other minor details, my visual problem has also been kept silent.

I went through the problem alone without relying on my friends that should be reliable.

If pointed out, it is clear I have such a character.

However, it is just my excuse.

「I have a role to lead you guys. This is one of the liabilities of the role.」

I am the Master of Lily and Co.

If there are family problems/squabbles among the girls, I, as a Master, must solve them.

The problems that arise from me, naturally I will solve them myself.

That is, no matter how imperfect, the duty of the leader leading the group.

Aside from lamenting my lack of strength, there is nothing wrong with my stance itself.

That should have been so.

「That's wrong.」

But Lily shook her flaxen-haired head.

「Why won't you understand? Taking on this and that and each and everything on your own, failing is a matter of course.」

「Like I said, that's due to my lack of strength」

「What's wrong with lacking strength? To compensate for that, aren't we the Family here?」

Receiving Lily's slightly upturned eyes appealing to me, I was being startled.

Unable to hold back the unstable emotions in herself, her eyes wavered like ripples on a lake surface.

It held enough destructive power to cause what small amount of pride I held in myself to waver violently.

「That is of course something even I know of, you know? That master's personality is one with a strong sense of responsibility. A self-punishing personality is also present in you. I know very well. I do, but...」

Tears spilled over and fell in large drops from Lily's eyes.

「Taking on things, is already something that cannot be helped but... ... rely on us a little.」

「Lily...」

I suddenly remembered.

During the time when I returned in a tattered state after getting caught

perfectly in the balloon fox's trap,

Upon seeing me, although at first Lily showed an upset expression, after that she treated me based on her own judgement until the end.

Although if it was the Lily I know, it wouldn't be strange even if she panicked.

She hadn't shown any tears.

Even so that does not equal 『Lily became able to not feel anything』

Under a resolute mask, she had been suppressing her agitated self. To borrow her own words, she conducted herself『fittingly as an eldest daughter』. Until this moment, she has been enduring it.

But now, here it was only the two of us.

There isn't a reason for Lily to act strong as an elder sister.

「I was scared. That maybe Master would die...」

Lily who suppressed her agitated self and accomplished her responsibility as an elder sister, is no longer the girl from when we just met, from when she had just consumed Mizushima Miho and obtained her girl form.

Change has definitely paid a visit

And for what purpose?

I don't know is something I won't say even if my mouth was torn apart.

That's obviously because, like she herself said, it is for the sake of 『Supporting me』.

However being the crux of the group, I not relying on her, her devotion was not rewarded.

Even Rose and Gerbera, In order to support me, they have been working hard in respective ways.

I had intended to do my best, but I probably made a mistake somewhere. The tears spilling over in front of me is proof of that.

In any case, now is not a good situation to abandon myself to regret.

I have other things to do. This time, I cannot afford to make a mistake.

「I'm sorry...」

Extending my hands towards the crying Lily, I embraced her.

Lily didn't resist. Instead she threw herself to me.

As I hugged her tightly, her sobbing leaked out from within my arms. I once again thought "I really made her anxious".

* * *

We remained snuggled together for a while.

It was a strangely calming period. If it could be this calm, I could have undoubtedly remained indifferent to that failure.

Before long, the sound of sniffing *SunSun* disappeared.

「This is something I'm saying from consulting Mizushima Miho's memories but...」

Having seemed to have calmed down, Lily spoke.

「There are various type of leaders」

「Types?」

Lily nodded.

With her bangs rubbing against my chest, it was slightly ticklish.

「Such as Powerful types that lead others along forcefully, or those that are a charisma-type that charms others.....」

「Both don't apply to me」

I let out a wry smile.

「Un. That's right」

Lily also didn't venture to deny my words.

「だけどね、ご主人様。そんな人たちに、わたしたちはついて行きたいと思わないんだよ」

「But Master. I don't think we would want to follow those types of people」

「...」

「『Never being composed, being cornered by personal worries, the plans I think of are full of holes. I don't have the power to solve everyone's problems』was it? Just now, didn't Master say something like that. But you know.....」

Lily gazed up at me from below.

「Always remaining composed, never worrying about anything, being able to solve any problems, a leader with the power to save everything reflected in his eyes. That is just some sort of an ideal」

Returning my own lamentation, clearly showing me the Image I held of 『As the leader of the girls' family, the me that I should be/must be』, and Lily expressed that as an 『Ideal/Dream』.

「If such a person really existed, I think it would be a very wonderful person. But that is just the fairytale hero that everyone dreams of. Denying something like that is something that is impossible to do.」

Lily slowly shook her head.

「But you see, even if there was such a person, we don't think we would want to follow him. After all, that's not『You』」

In the eyes of Lily who said that, the me who was lost in her words is reflected.

Right here, right now, she was firmly gazing at me.

「The one I like is not some ideal person. He is not someone being drawn from my ideal form. I can't like something that is just an illusion. I like the Master that tries to do something for us, even if lacking power or something, trying desperately for us. Whether he has sufficient power or not, it doesn't matter at all.」

「.....but, I'm your Master, as the leader I can't be a burden. As such I can't be so powerless right?」

「There is no such thing」

Lily pressed and rubbed her flaxen head into my chest.

「Then conversely, if we were useless would Master abandon us?」

「No way!」

I denied that immediately.

「No way, that is impossible!」

「.....Un. If it was Master, I thought it would be like that. Fufu. As one of the Family, being happy here is no good but..」

A bittersweet smile floated on the face of Lily who had raised her face.

「But, I'm happy.」

Lily gently clasped my cheeks with both hands.

「But Master, That this is the same for us, is something I want you to understand.」

Lily's palm affectionately stroked my cheek.

「Let us support you. Rely on us more. Don't do the impossible alone. It's fine to lack power. Us Family are useless creatures unless we join forces but... Master is definitely also the same...」

「I'm also... the same?」

「Un. Isn't that surely, the way that Master and us Family are supposed to be.」

The way we are supposed to be.

The words that Lily spoke, I have never thought of that until now. That is because, to me, that was something I hadn't tried to think about.

There was no need to think about it, it was because I was under such an impression.

I thought that I must lead them along.

I had decided that was the way it had to be.

However, originally that was not something to be unequivocally decided.

As Lily said earlier, there are various ways of being a leader. Taking into account the leader's own personality and the nature of the group, there is no choice but to individually look for ways to become better.

I had been neglecting something so obvious.

And thinking about it, it was not that Lily said anything wild. Instead she did nothing more than point out the blatantly obvious.

Certainly if someone is as charismatic as god, have the power to lead others along, and have the intelligence to resolve any and everything, there is nothing that can surpass that.

But I am nothing except a normal student you can find anywhere. It's vexing but that is the me right now. The seventeen year old me known as Majima Takahiro. That is something I myself cannot deny.

On that fated day, on the border of life and death in that cave, awakening the power I possessed, I suddenly became the master leading Lily and the rest of the family.

However, even so nothing about me changed.

Without any preparation, a brat that could be found anywhere like me, there was no way to be able to display the nature of a stereotypical leader.

Even still trying to act as a 『Splendid leader』, overdoing it somewhere is a matter of course.

——I have to somehow do it.

——I will resolve it all.

Thinking those things.....was in a sense conceited.

Looking at me, there were those who helped me.

Those who said they want to support me.

Joining hands with them, focusing on the same goal, proceeding on while cooperating.

Probably, what I should be aiming at, is that.

If it is us now, we should be able to do that.

That is because, having become aware of my own inexperience and limits, accepting them I can now take measures. Even Lily and the others, they were by no means weak existences that need to be lead by me.

「All of us will combine our power. Live by supporting each other. If that was the way that we were originally supposed to be...I've been mistaken the whole time...」

Because of this, this is the new starting point for me and the girls.

Strangely, same as that time in that cave, alone with Lily in a small space, I embraced a new determination in my chest.

Everyone helping each other, let's survive in this other world.

The power that dwells in my body is for that sake after all.

「Thank you, Lily. Thanks to you I came to my senses.」

To the precious Lily who taught me that, putting in my flood of emotions, I thanked her.

「From now on I will be relying on you. Please support me.」

「Un...Unn. Master!」

Seeming to be overcome with emotion, Lily hugged my body tightly.

Once again I hugged her in return,

Our faces moved naturally, closing even closer from the already close distance, we smiled at each other.

Our bodies came into contact through the texture of the wet jersey. Not enough. Not enough at all. Hugging as to fill the gaps, the path informed me of Lily's desire.

That was, the same as what I am desiring now.

「Master...」

Linking our eyes, the tips of our noses touching, our lips met like we were trying to suck each other in.

I suddenly thought that it's been awhile since we were 『alone together』.

Well that doesn't mean anything in particular.

I'm so satisfied I can't move anyway.

Embracing Lily who wrapped her arms behind my head, exchanging a kiss with her, feeling her abundant bulge through the soaking wet material of the jersey, as I thought that——

「Ow」

——at the pain that ran through the back of my left hand, I gave a small cry of pain.

「Ah. Sorry」

At the voice I leaked out, Lily separated from me.

Seeming to think she had put a burden on my body, her fine eyebrows lowered.

「No. It's not that Lily did anything」

As I straightened my body that had curled up in surprise to the pain, I waved my hand at her.

「For some reason my hand suddenly hurt.....」

As I began saying that, I was startled

「What's wrong...」

Lily's words also cut off in the middle.

The speechless her stared. At the back of my left hand where I felt the pain just now.

There, an emerald green protrusion had grown.

A small amount of red blood flowed from the edge of the growth. This is probably the cause of the pain. Drop by drop, it fell into the water the bath tub and diluted.

The emerald green protrusion, was even now energetically growing rapidly.

The I finally realised, that was the seedling of a plant.

In such an abnormal situation, there was no way it was just an ordinary seedling. At the tip, like a snake raising its neck, a head with no eyes or nose and only a mouth appeared.

「M, aS, Ter」

.....It spoke.

Although the pronunciation was awkward and creaky, that was certainly the call of a monster of the Family yearning for me as a master.

To be at a loss of words is this huh.

Why would 『a monster grow out of my body』. I don't understand. Since when did such an omen...

「Ah...」

That my blanked head had arrived at 『that truth』might be something miraculous.

I called out to Lily who seems to be dumbfounded like me.

「Naa, Lily」

「Whaat, Master」

「Do you have any memory of extracting a Gun Vine's seed from my left hand?」

The place I was first shot by a seed, was the back of my left hand.

Since it was such a violent scene, that remembering it almosts makes me feel unwell, that memory was left vividly in my brain.

And, during the operation where the seeds were being dug out of me, there is no memory of a seed being extracted from my left hand.

Since my consciousness was hazy at that time, I thought it was just that I don't remember it, but when Lily who carried out that operation shook her head sideways, that possibility disappeared.

Which means... ..that, probably.

「By any chance, my magic power being exhausted, is because of this guy?」

I almost died due to lack of magic power.

The Gun Vine is a parasitic monster.

Absorbing nutrients from its host could be said to be its way of life.

「No. But, at most that is for trees. Something nonsensical like growing from a person's body...」

「Ah. Wait, Master. That is a bit wrong.」

Lily interrupted my words.

「The attack method of Gun Vines is similar to how lilies shoot out seeds from their flowers right? It is something obvious but, seeds are usually a method of reproduction, not a method of attack」

「Maa, that's right」

「And yet why do you think Gun Vines shoot out seeds like bullets?」

Once questioned, it does seem to be a weird phenomenon. Based on my knowledge relating to living things, to create seeds or fruits should be an event that requires a lot of energy. To use that as a disposable method of attack, in the end is that possible?

As I pondered without having an response, Lily told me the answer.

「The reason why Gun Vines use seeds as a method of attack, is because it is part of their life cycle. This type of plants like Gun Vines, will shoot the prey to death and absorb the nutrients to germinate. I to date had seen many cases of this before. 」

「So, growing from my body is not impossible?」

Thinking of vegetation growing from my corpse like caterpillar fungus, I

shivered.

If not for Gerbera giving me magic power, I would have been sucked dry and died already. This situation is in the end nothing more than the result of her haphazard ability...

「Besides, in this first place is this really a Gun Vine?」

「What do you mean?」

「Isn't the shape and appearance entire different」

Now that it was mentioned, it seems so. This thing before me seems to differ slightly from the standard shape of Gun Vines.

The greatest difference is probably the lack of Lily-like flowers blooming. Like this, it is unable to fulfill its function as a Gun Vine. If that is that case, this is——

「——the same a Lily. A Unique Monster」

An extremely rare occurrence of a mutated species among monsters.

The monster lodged in me, just happens to be one of those.

Could such a coincidence even occur.

If thought about like that, the reverse way of thinking fits much more.

「It's because it lodged in me, that this guy germinated as a Unique Monster.....?」

My body, even if provisionally, is that of a cheat ability wielder. Like killing a dragon with a single punch, the same as a jack-in-the-box that overturns logic. No matter what happens it wouldn't be strange.

「... Well if we embedded some other seed into my body once again, we would be able to make it clear...」

「Don't say stupid things. This time time you will die for sure.」

「Yeah」

There is no guarantee I could live after doing it a second time. Even Garbera would probably be against a second time. There was no way I could propose something that would be throwing dirt on her hard work, it was obviously a joke.

「So, Master, what do we do about this?」

Shooting a glare at me who said a bad joke, Lily inquired.

With the right hand where there is no parasitic monster growing, I scratched my hair which had become somewhat shorter.

「What to do... ...tearing it off is probably not an option.」

I can clearly feel the path with this parasitic monster, and that it has no hostility is being transmitted to me.

「Mas, T, eR! tEr!」

Maybe because it was just born, it doesn't seem to be very intelligent. It also doesn't seem able to say anything other than call to me.

But, even so I could understand it innocently adores me. Pulling it out and killing it is an act that would cause considerably strong stabbing feelings of guilt.

Besides, thinking about it, the one who shot seeds into my body was the Gun Vine that was this one's mother, in the end this guy just germinated.

Even if the mother tried to kill me, it is not the fault of the child that was born. The situation might be slightly different, but that way of thinking was not impossible.

「From what can be seen, the condition seems stable, there is also no reason to have to try to kill it... In the first place, can this guy even be torn off.」

Its roots seem to spread in my body but how deeply it has taken root is unknown. If done poorly, there maybe a need to chop off my arm. The risk for that is too high.

When such thought are being conveyed to it or not, a creaking sound rang out in protest.

「Goshuji, MaSta! Goshu, Sama! Sama!」

「I understand I understand. I will not peel you off.」

「Is this okay? Goshujin-sama?」

At Lily's question, I shrugged my head.

The feeling of being parasitized by something which tried to kill is delicate but if you were to think about it, the story/experience about Gerbera is also about the same.

... And, because I had thought about that.

「Thy Lord! Thy Lord, Where art thou!」

Speak of the devil.

Along with Gerbera's voice, I can heard flurried movements.

「... What is it this time?」

There is Gerbera's presence who is searching for me at the other side of the wall.

「Thou art over there , thy Lord!」

After walking to and fro, she seems to deduce my location and her peculiar walking sound started moving towards our direction.

「thy Lord ! 」

Ban with a huge noise, the door was thrown open.

With fluttering white hair, Gerbera entered the 『Bathroom』. It appears

somehow or another that she just woke up since there are some disarranged bed hair.

When her presence comes before our very eyes, Lily and I hug each other absentmindedly

Just that, Gerbera's appearance is now in a state of shock.

「Gerbera」

I inquired.

「There is something riding on your head, isn't it?」

Riding on top of her white hair which made people believe that it's spider's silk, there is a beast drained of energy.

It's tail swelled and it's pointed ears are triangular.

The round and *fuwafuwa*(fluffy) and soft light reddish brown fur on it's body. No matter how you see it, it gives off an atmosphere as if it just borned only a few months ago.

Opening it's mouth, sharp and small cute teeth are exposed. When it breathes in, the body which was sitting on my palm expanded.

The body who completely expanded like a balloon shrinked and thin smokes are being puffed out from his mouth (and rising into the air)

There is no mistaking this.

「Balloon Fox」

「.....'s kid. Gerbera. Where did you pick this up?」

When Lili took my question from my mouth and inquired, the balloon fox which belched and lost it's balance making Gerbera flustered, and Gerbera stopped moving immediately.

「I did not pick it up. A little while back, it came along.」

「It came along...」

「From the place where thy Lord almost died till here, it is a considerable distance. It's probably not weird for the fox cub to travel here by foot in 1 day. 」

Looking at it closely, this fox's fur is also very dirty.

During the time my life is hanging by a thread, this child fox probably faced great danger as well.

「So, why is that thing riding on Gerbera's head?」

「I don't know. Don't ask me. Ask this brat.」

「No, it's okay to take it down.」

「Thinking if I were to touch it, it will break down. Such a possibility might exist.」

Unthinkable! Gerbera who look at me with eyes which seem to not have

faith in me. Tentatively, it seems like she has forgotten that this fox cub is a monster.

With an atmosphere where I can't say anything, I gazed at Gerbera. Then, Rose and Kato-san both turned up and peek inside.

「Master, did something happen? ...Oh?」

「For some reason it became something troublesome didn't it.」

With a fox kit riding atop Gerbera's head, looking at the parasitic plant growing on the back of my hand, the girls look wide eyed.

In a blink of an eye the bath became completely lively.

「Master」

Inside the arm, Lili begins to stir/moved.

I read her intention and let go of her hand, this causes her to give out a bitter smile.

「Somehow, it didn't turn into『That kind of mood』, right...」

「... That's right isn't it.」

I also return a bitter smile. With it being just the two of us for a while, it seems like that time was over. It was a little disappointing.

「Master? 」

「Yes ? ...Ah. Thank you.」

Lily who was standing up, to help me stand/get out reached out with her hand.

When taking her hand, Lily put on a happy expression out of nowhere.

「But, isn't that okay.」

「 ? What is that you're saying?」

「Master was saying something like『Impatiently, Fruitlessly, Not able to do anything. Not being able to obtain anything. 』.」

Lili tilted her head to me and she greeted me with an earnest smile.

「It wasn't meaningless for Master and Ganbera doing their best you know.」

And like that, we ended up adding our friends getting the fourth and fifth member added to our family.

Chapter 10: The Scenery I Wish To Protect

I, who was to rest for several more days, in order to effectively use the time to fully recover, was to be provided with the opportunity to discuss our future plans with my companions.

Our next direction... In other words, to stay here or to search for human civilization to the 『North』, or we could aim to join up with the First Expedition Unit to the 『East』.

“Shouldn’t we head towards civilization? Fortunately, with Gerbera’s testimony, we know that humans exist in this world as well as the direction to exit this forest.”

Lily supports the notion of exiting the forest to the north.

“Considering Master’s body, I think that it is better to resupply our goods as soon as we can.”

Up to this point, it is the same as what I thought. However, Lily had a slightly different outlook as well.

“Master has received several severe injuries up till now, hasn’t he? In order to heal, plenty of rest and consumption of nourishing food is required. However, it is hard to get our hands on what we require. I’m worried that one day we’ll not be able to do so.”

Lily pointed out the fact that my body has actually become thinner than before.

Even though I wasn't aware of it myself—for her who constantly hugs me—it seems that she's more sensitive to the minute changes of my body more than I am.

Perhaps due to depending on the benefits of recovery magic, it has crept up on me without me noticing it. For now, I can cover it up, but there is a limit to how long I can continue doing so.

I have been slow since I was knocked down. On no accounts would I be baggage to Lily and the others, my real intention was to feign it.

Rose and Gerbera supported her opinion after hearing what Lily pointed out.

What's left to think about would be the matter regarding Kato-san.

However, the person in question, Kato-san herself asserted that we should set out towards the east.

Even if we head to the east, it is not definite that we will meet up with the Expedition Unit. That was her opinion and it was quite a reasonable point.

Thus we settled on heading towards the north. What's left is just to

decide on when to set off.

Even if I deliberately discussed this with Lily and the others, in the end the job of making the final decision was left to me.

The day to depart is near.

I prepared my mind and body for the coming of that day.

* * *

That day's evening, when the weariness of my body finally faded away.

I took Lily out with me to the exit of the Arachne's nest.

In that dark and gloomy forest, the vague silhouette of the sunset resembled the dissolving spill of ink to one's eyes.

In order to ascertain the condition of my body, I rotated my shoulder several times and my line of sight fell on the finger of my left hand.

"Now, let's start the test. Can you do it, Asarina?"

"Goshuu, sama!"

Answering with a voice like the creaking of several trees, Rifle Vine, or rather, Parasitic Vine—whose name we came up with after discussing with

Kato-san, Asarina—extended from top of my finger of my left arm.

The figure looked as if it was a snake rushing out from a burrow. Stretching itself out swiftly, it ascertained its target.

"Go!"

The green snake shot its body out on my command.

5 meters of its front end that was stretched out pierced through a bundle of wood that was right in front of me.

Splinters of tree bark and leaves scattered about simultaneously with a ringing sound, followed by the dull resonance of a hard object sinking into its trunk.

"Guu... Alright, return."

I made Asarina return, enduring while clenching my teeth as a burden came over and hung from my wrist to shoulder.

Confirming the course of events from beginning to the end, the targeted wood trunk had a 2 cm wide and 3 cm deep hole burrowed in it.

"That's not bad."

Satisfied with the results, I nodded and caressed Asarina whose head

was waving from side to side while loosely coiled around the armor of my left arm, with the finger of my right hand.

“Goshuu, shu, shu, sama! Sama!”

Asarina cannot utilize bullets like a normal Rifle Vine. This is because she does not possess the organ that makes it possible.

I still don't know if it is something that would develop as she matures or if this is a sign that she is a new species, a deviant of a Rifle Vine.

It's a pity that she cannot use the bullets of her kind but in exchange, Asarina had stronger powers of maneuverability compared to Rifle Vines. Her extremely flexible body is capable of movements like that of a whip, to lash out in a straight line with an intense strike like she did just now.

Is it possible to be intercepted or separated from each other...? I was merely worrying about those thoughts, but I already knew that those were needless anxieties.

In fact, before Asarina's body would get cut into shreds, she would first grow her head out again. It could be said to be the disposition of a plant to have strong vitality.

The apex of the plant looks like the head of a snake but it is not as if the central nervous system is located there. If I had to say where it was, Asarina's real body would be the root that is affixed on my left arm instead.

Because of that, there is a sense of discomfort when I move my left arm but I will probably get used to it eventually.

And so, Asarina, who has taken root in my hand normally sips at my magic little by little. It's for sustaining her vitality and for the sake of using it as an energy source when combat breaks out in an emergency.

Now that Asarina is capable of thought, she is different from when she was in germination, she can now control the precise amount of magic she absorbs. For example, when my magic is low, she would absorb a small amount and when I have excess, she would absorb more accordingly.

From another point of view, Asarina's role can be called something like 'an external storage for my excess magical power that's unused'.

On the other hand, I cannot even draw out my own magical power, but she can use my magical power as fuel and aid me as as my fighting strength.

This was something momentous.

Because with this, I have finally received the power to survive a fight on my own—a seed of possibility that's capable of doing that.

Of course, this is just Asarina's power. It isn't mine.

However, as long as we are not torn away from each other, there is no meaning in fighting as two separate people considering our current situation.

It's miserable to require relying on another's strength as usual, but it wouldn't help anyone if I was to be obstinate about it.

I must never be lectured by Lily to the point of tears ever again.

I'll just do what I can. Those are the honest thoughts of the current me.

"It seems that its power is something that we can hold expectations towards."

Lily who was watching while seated stood up and approached.

"What's left is to use the path to see how detailed of an order you can give... How is that faring?"

"Well, it still requires practice."

It probably wouldn't be able to make it in time if instructions are voiced out in the midst of a fight. Considering that, being able to handle Asarina as if we are of one mind is an indispensable skill in combat.

For this purpose, I thought to myself; "Why don't I use the path?"

From what I know of the path until now, the closer the distance, the higher the transmission rate. I based this conjuncture from my past experiences; because when there is body contact, an abundant amount of information was exchanged—there shouldn't be a mistake about it.

In addition to that, if you have the intention of conveying what's inside you to the other party, we know that the contents of the information can be increased to a certain extent. For example, Lily's method to repel Gerbera when she was an enemy is an application of that.

Because Asarina has taken root in me, this can be said to be an insurmountable level of direct contact. What's left is nothing except to practice accurately transmitting instructions.

Of course, when my instructions are not able to make it in time, Asarina should have the judgement to act accordingly. In that sense, she doesn't just play the role of my weapon, but I expect her to work as a semi-automatic defense system as well.

"It would be good if it went well..."

While playing with Asarina with her finger, Lily spoke.

"It's a huge advantage to be allowed to be at Master's side at all times."

"Well, that's because it's physically impossible to be far in the first place."

Within my Family of Monsters, the combat ability Asarina possesses is in one of the lowest category.

It's likely that it's hard to even fight a head-on battle against one of the

normal monsters.

But by constantly being with me, her low combat ability can be compensated for into an advantage. It is just as Lily has said.

However, what came out of Lily's mouth seems to be slightly off from what I thought.

"But... I see. To be always together with Master ah..."

Withdrawing her hand from playing with Asarina, Lily put her hands behind her back.

She, who was looking upwards at me, turned her lips into a slight pout.

"I... might be kind of jealous of that."

"..."

As casually as possible, Lily approached me as though it was nothing special at all.

Nevertheless, to the targeted person himself, it didn't seem to be enough to fool him.

Well, that's the way it is for a man and a woman who don't hold negative feelings towards each other in a relationship.

It's obvious to want to be together all the time. It's natural to find excuses just to stick with the other. It's not as if she's especially clingy.

...It's the same even for me. It's just that I am unable to say it out loud.

"It has gotten dark, huh. Since it seems like dinner would be done soon, shall we return?"

Startled by her cute gestures, I averted my eyes from her adorable sulking and suggested in a half-hearted tone.

"Seems like it. Master's sickness hasn't completely healed as well, it would not be good to overexert yourself."

Lily hugged my right arm tightly.

Even if I don't voice it out, the feelings of my embarrassment would be known to her. That is definitely not a bad feeling.

* * *

When we returned to the nest, the preparations for dinner were done.

There were ingredients threaded on skewers that were hung over an

open fire brightly burning in the sunken hearth that Lily made.

Today's menu is Big Scissors' meat. This is something that Gerbera hunted and brought back herself.

When I actually tried tasting it, the meat of Big Scissors were plainer in taste as I had expected. Although it's several times better than Fire Fang's meat in comparison.

It has only been grilled now but I don't have the feeling that it wouldn't be good if it was eaten raw with shoyu. Kato-san thought the same and started talking to Rose, who was still working, during the meal about Japan's sushi, sashimi and other trifling matters.

Lately, the scene of them chatting could often be seen.

While I was away, the two of them were always together. It could be that they had the opportunity to deepen their relationship.

There were other places where the scene was different from the past.

I gave thanks to Asarina as she stretched out her slender body to bite and retrieve a skewer of meat for me and looked to the person seated on my left, Gerbera.

The dangling short legs of a young fox cub that's lying on its belly can be seen on Gerbera's head. This as well, is something that's commonly seen recently.

"This... Ayame. Why hath Master adorned me so?"

'Ayame' is a young Balloon Fox that I named.

Looking up at Ayame on top of its head, Gerbera slightly furrowed her thin eyebrows as though she was troubled. Although it doesn't seem like Gerbera actually dislikes it. With the physical capabilities of a White Arachne, it should be a simple thing to seize the young Ayame. Since she did not do so, it's a simple thing to guess at what she's really thinking.

"Kuu—, kuu—."

"I would be troubled if thou crieth as if thou art displeased. I ought to complain instead of thou."

"Kuu."

"... What an irksome fellow."

It seems that the young Ayame is fond of Gerbera and is more often found with her.

Although she fidgets around a lot and can't keep still like a kid, by the time she realized it, she climbed Gerbera's flat spider abdomen and reached the top of her white head.

Gerbera, despite being at a loss regarding Ayame's actions, did not

seem to harbor any negative thoughts towards her new sister's existence at all.

"Muu. Could you be still for a while?"

While saying similar to that, Gerbera chased after Ayame to properly look after her.

Pleasant and ordinary scenes like that with Ayame as a set were shown to me.

Ayame, as though playing with Gerbera, ran around the inside of the nest.

And lastly, ran over to Rose's side, who was talking to Kato-san.

"Oh my. What's wrong, Ayame? That's dangerous, you know."

Rose was working as usual, while her right hand holds the knife, her left hand held the sword that she carved out. Follicking around under her arms is dangerous.

Disregarding Rose's concern, while giving off a ku-ku- sound, Ayame laid down on her hard wooden knee.

"I guess it cannot be helped."

Rose stopped her work in the middle and left the objects that were in her hands on the floor.

Her hands wavered a little, feeling lost before landing on Ayame's head to stroke her stiffly.

Then, Gerbera who was chasing Ayame arrived.

"My apologies, Lady Rose. Ayame hath been a bother to thee."

"No. I don't really mind it."

Ayame, whom Gerbera was looking at, laid her body down at the spot while being petted by Rose.

It appears that she wanted to be spoiled by the sister that she usually does not spend time with.

Gerbera stood still with a awkward expression.

Such a Gerbera looked at the expressionless face of Rose who continued to stroke Ayame.

"Cute isn't she? Ayame."

"A-aye."

Gerbera nods and folded her eight legs.

" ... "

" ... "

With Ayame in the middle, Gerbera and rose sat next to each other.

Looking alternatively between them, Ayame swings her fluffy tail from side to side.

" ... "

" ... "

The two of them completely stiffened up without uttering anything.

"Kuu?"

Ayame tilted her head while Kato-san breathed a sigh.

"How about talking about something instead of looking at each other?"

Kato-san said with a exasperated tone after staring for a while.

"Look, Ayame. Since your two sisters look like they are going to

converse, come over here."

As Kato-san clicked her tongue, Ayame looked at both Rose and Gerbera before slipping through Rose's hands and headed to her side.

The two people who were left behind exchanged glances with each other.

Now, it became a situation where neither of them can stand and leave without having a single conversation. Now that it has come to this, there is no choice but to accept it.

Above all, the youngest sister is watching the two of them intently with cute, black round eyes.

Aren't you going to chat?

Why are you still waiting?

...Such voices could almost be heard from gaze that is staring at them. One cannot help but to say that it's awkward.

"Did Master say anything about this?"

After several seconds of silence spent searching for a topic, The one who got the ball rolling was Rose, the elder sister.

"Combining my special skill in manufacturing magical tools and your weaving skills to make better armor?"

"Hou."

"I think that it is a good and valuable plan that is worth consideration. What about you?"

"Indeed. It is a good plan, I think so too. ...What kind of things are you considering for example, Lady Rose?"

"Let's see."

The conversation started flowing.

The two of them are masters at their craft in production. Although they may still be awkward in ordinary conversations, if it's specially about producing goods, it seems like they would have an inexhaustible topic.

Speaking about Ayame who created this opportunity, she listened to the conversation of the two who sprouted small smiles as she curled up into a ball on Kato-san's knees and started sleeping with a 'kuu kuu' sound.

Although she did everything at her own pace, it was certainly due to Ayame that the atmosphere had calmed down.

The weakest companion out of us is undoubtedly her.

Her mobility is at the level of a puppy, whose fur just started growing out, back in the world we lived in. She also has a monster-like endurance but although she may be possible of spitting out fireballs—a specialty of Balloon Foxes—she wouldn't be able to survive a battle on her own.

However, Ayame's existence gave us a certain sort of comfort. With such a rare disposition, she has become another indispensable existence to me.

"Wouldn't it be great if such days were to continue forever?"

I nodded while feeling a flood of emotions towards Lily's words, whom was snuggling by my side.

"Aah. That's right. I really wish so..."

I somehow had a hunch that it was an impossible wish.

By leaving this forest, I would probably be in an environment that is a sudden change from the one I left behind.

If I take a step into the human world, I would be forced to face my fellow race, humans, whether I like it or not.

I am a Master who leads a Family of Monsters like Lily. No matter what happens, we will help each other out and live on—I resolved thus in my heart. <checked>

Leading monsters is my special trait but I still don't know how the humans of this world would react to it at this point of time.

We would eventually chance upon the people of my race in actuality... I don't know what kind of connection we may have with strangers that were students.

I have absolutely no need to accept them but I wished that they would at least not have any antagonism.

Nevertheless, if they became hostile... At that time, I would also resolve myself and fight against my fellow race, the humans. In order to protect this sight that is in front of me.

* * *

It was several days after that that I set out from the Arachne's nest.

We are headed towards the north——We stepped forward to the edge of the forest and the human world that stretches beyond it.

Chapter 11: Journey To The North

Our journey to the north was a smooth one.

With the greatest fighting strength—the White Arachne—Gerbera, Lily, who can mimic the smelling sense of a Fire Fang as a scout and Rose who will fight steadfastly as a human wall, occasionally—even the multitude of monsters that appeared could not break through this lineup.

I would like to somehow involve the two new members to work together by all means but now is still not the time suited for them to shine.

Of course, it would be fortunate to not encounter such situations. However, the fact is that I can't be saying that all of the time. It's better to save our fighting strength for when it's required.

After ending today's portion of the journey, I tested various battle simulations with Asarina after finishing dinner.

「...Guu.」

「Just wait a minute. I'll heal you up.」

Seeing me bite my molars in pain, Lily formulated a healing magic formation on her fingertip.

The targeted area is the left hand where Asarina dwells in.

Bathed by a warm light, the throbbing pains in my joints alleviated a little.

However, my furrowed eyebrows remained as they were.

「This is a problem... isn't it?」

Her voice seems bitter. Her tone had become something like a groan unknowingly.

Today is the third consecutive night of combat practice with Asarina after leaving the Arachne's nest.

It is still hard to give detailed instructions but simple commands can be transmitted without vocalization through the path.

This can be said to be going more favorably than expected.

However, an unexpected issue has arisen instead.

「I have thought of how weak I am, but only after coming here, does it come back to haunt me.」

I opened and closed my fingers to check the recovery of my hand.

It was the rough hand of a man that had received many small wounds, trying to survive in another world.

Yet, contrary to the exterior, it was a fragile body.

That weakness has become a problem.

Using it will definitely have repercussions on my body.

Even if it's in the alternate world with the mysterious existence of such a thing as magic, the world's rules don't change. It's the law of nature.

Editor Oni: I'm being very liberal with the translation here because

otherwise I can't see any way to rephrase it, and leaving it as is makes no sense.

If humans who haven't trained carelessly punch something, it will injure their fist. In addition, there are cases where their wrist will be sprained as well. In the same light, it has happened to my body as well. That is due to me being unable to withstand the impact of Asarina's attacks.

It would not be worth considering if I cannot go full power...

Holding back Asarina is unreasonable so, the result of wielding her full power, is me showing my shameful side and fainting due to the pain of my wrist and elbows. Such was the disastrous appearance that I showed.

「Goshu, shu, sama...」

「It's not your fault. Don't blame yourself.」

I stroked Asarina, who suddenly curled to a length of one centimeter after emerging from the back of my hand, with my fingertip.

Doing so had a healing effect on my mind but the pain of my headache still remains.

Even though Asarina finally became a weapon for me, with this, I can't bring out her full power.

「...What should I do about this?」

In the end, all of us who sat down together to brainstorm could not come up with anything, I *Gari Gari* scratched my head and sighed.

My line of sight landed on Lily who was beside me. She hit her fingertip against her lips and looked as if she was pondering about something.

「Lilly, do you have any thoughts on this?」

When I asked her, Lily directed her large black eyes towards me.

「Un. It's not that I don't have an idea but...」

「Really?」

「It's just that I'm not sure if it'll go well. But I think it's worth a try.」

Having something to think about means that she has an idea but has yet to consolidate her thoughts. That said, as long as she has an idea with a small probability of working, it is worth considering.

「Would you elaborate on it?」

「Of course. However, if that's the case, we would need to request the cooperation of someone.」

「Cooperation... of who?」

「Of Gerbera. Her help is required. It will need double the effort as well, so let's talk to her for now.」

So Lily said, as we moved to the open fire to the side of where Rose and Gerbera are sitting.

We sat down in a circle around the bonfire.

As for our positions, Lily and Gerbera are on my left and right, Rose and

Kato-san are in front. Ayame seems to be already asleep, soft snoring sounds of *kuu kuu* could be heard from the top of Gerbera's spider abdomen.

「And so, what request dost thou have of me?」

Gerbera promptly asked and Lily spoke of the problems we are facing regarding battle training with Asarina.

「I understand the situation now. Yet I do not see what help I could be...」

After listening to the story, Gerbera made a serious face.

「Lily-dono, thou hast a plan of sorts, dost thou not?」

「Un. There is something I want to ask Gerbera to do.」

Lily nodded in confirmation to Gerbera's words.

「As a matter of fact, I want Gerbera to help out in Master's magic training.」

「The magic training?」

Gerbera's scarlet eyes widened as though this was completely out of her expectations.

「Alas, is it not Lily-dono's role to serve as the teacher?」

I, who have increased in magic capacity after Gerbera became a member of the Family, had begun to take an elementary introduction to magic since three days ago.

This would take place after my training with Asarina and is the schedule for tonight as well.

Lily's request is for Gerbera to play the teacher's role for that.

「If it's about magic, rather than I, isn't Lily-dono more proficient than myself? Could not Lily-dono continue teaching Milord?」

「If it's just teaching basic attribute magic, me teaching will be the best but...」

While speaking, Lily stretched her hand across to Gerbera who was sitting on the other side of me and took a hold of her wrist.

「Umu?」

「Look. Master as well.」

「...? Ahh.」

Together with Gerbera who had a disagreeable expression on her face, I held my hand out as well.

「Alright then.」

Lily pulled our hands together and struck our forearms together.

Being lined side by side to the elbows, I can feel Gerbera's slightly lower temperature.

...Somehow this feels embarrassing.

Gerbera seems to feel the same, her cheeks slightly reddened.

「Gerbera's hand looks pretty. Soft and tender, they're smooth without a single wound.」

「Same can be said of Lily-dono as well.」

「That's because mine are imitations. Besides, compared to Gerbera...」

Lily let out a wry smile while saying that, keeping the figure of the undisputed beauty, Mizushima Miho, when she was alive.

There is one part that is slightly different. The place that was upgraded is at the front of the body. As for the rest of the body, she had precisely copied the original. Of course, the appearance is that of a sweet girl.

Fairy: He is being very vague about the upgraded boobs. That's the crutch of the sentence.

However, being compared to Gerbera is cruel. Gerbera's beauty is on a different level.

She has a flawless inhuman beauty, which is in a completely different dimension from Lily whose appearance is an imitation of a human being.

Of course, they aren't originally meant to be compared, nor should they be compared. Even if I was to compare them with that in mind, as a Japanese there is a certain feel of loveliness in Lily and in that sense many men would support her. In that case, it would be completely due to personal tastes.

Putting that aside...

「Isn't the conversation going off-topic?」

「Oh, you're right.」

Lily stuck out her tongue then proceeded with the conversation.

「Master, I want you to compare your arm with Gerbera's arm.」

「Arm?」

Doing as told, I looked at Gerbera's arm.

It was the thin arm of a girl.

My arm full of injuries and scars can't even be compared to her beautiful and supple arms.

「Gerbera's arm is pretty thin. It's so much more delicate than Master's arm which can't handle Asarina's blow.」

As expected. I'm a man, while Gerbera is a monster, she is still a woman nonetheless. All facts aside, mine should be firmer in appearance.

「However, if you were to have arm wrestling with Gerbera, Master would definitely not win.」

「Well, that's true.」

Since this was a fact, I nodded without resistance.

「Win or lose aside, won't the arm be crushed instead?」

「I would not do that!」

Gerbera immediately refutes but I'm pretty sure that what Lily had in mind wasn't that at all.

In my memory, I recall the recent brave figure of Gerbera — luring away the group of gun vines; the savage looks of the white spider.

That ferocity was also a very beautiful scene.

Even if I were to train a lot, I would not be able to do the same.

...Wait. Is it really impossible?

I somehow feel that I understand what Lily was going for.

「We are monsters and Master is human, there may be differences in the structure of the muscles but under no circumstances Gerbera's slim arms and freakish strength match at all. That's to be expected, this is because of this world's particular phenomenon.」

「Simply put, magic huh.」

Even if it seems impossible with the law of physics, this world still has its own specific laws. Following through, things outside my common sense is then rendered possible.

「Pretty much.」

Nodding in agreement with my words, Lily separated both our hands and drew closer.

「Being a Mimic Slime, I have maintained this appearance with magic. Rose being a Magical Puppet is moving the body of a doll. This is the same for the parasitic vine Asarina. Ayame the balloon fox is able to produce fire with magic. Of course, the same applies with Gerbera.」

「Ah. With magic power 」

Strengthening of physical abilities using magic.

After that I recalled that moment, after the forced transition to this world, the figure of that student that killed a dragon through beating it.

That sort of rampage from a person with cheat ability was brought forth through the enormous magical power that he held and the ability to use it together,

According to this conversation, that was apparently a skill that did not require special capabilities.

With that, even I should be able to do it. Even if it is not to that extent, if this body became even a bit sturdier, the situation would surely change for the better.

At the very least, if I were able to command Asarina, who is hidden in the left arm of my weak body, properly then it wouldn't be a problem. The problem is the degree of difficulty in achieving that.

「What Lili-dono suggests me to do is 『To teach Milord body strengthening using magic』But...」

「...」

Gerbera furrowed her eyebrows in confusion.

「Be that the case, even if it's Lily-dono who is teaching, it will be fine.

That sort of skill dost not belong to me alone.」

Gerbera's point was reasonable.

With this logic, it doesn't matter who will be teaching.

「Of course, 'tis not like I hate teaching Milord. But, in the first place, is it not agreed that Lily-dono will be teaching Milord? Is this okay? The chance of teaching Milord, thou wilt pass it to myself with nay any regrets?」

「That is a little unpleasant but...」

Lily, hearing Gerbera expressing her worry about something other than myself, although she wore a bitter smile, did not harbor any ill feelings towards her little sister.

The fact of teaching me the fundamentals of magic, the girls seem to be having fun as well. When I realized this, I felt a somewhat itchy feeling within me.

[ED note: He is getting embarrassed. Think of it like in an anime when a character itches the back of their head while laughing slightly due to embarrassment from praise.]

Even if she will abandon such enjoyable times, it seems like Lily has already considered that Gerbera should be the one to teach me magic related to body strengthening.

That reason was recited from the girl personally.

「I believe Gerbera's teaching will be the most effective. Probably. 」

「Fumu, what do you mean by that?」

「The magic power within Master's body is almost Gerbera's magic power. First of all, I believe letting Gerbera try it out now is the best shortcut」

My Magic power increased due to Gerbera becoming part of my family. This is due to the fact that one portion of Gerbera's magic was transferred to me through the path.

With the birth of Asarina, some of that magic power is constantly being drained by her But it is only a small portion.

At the beginning, the amount of magic power that I used to have was just a minuscule amount. But the present amount of magical power that I have now can be said to be roughly that of Gerbera's.

So having the original owner of said magic power teach the way of using it, is what Lily is thinking of.

「I see. So 'tis that sort of thing. But with that, there is one more thing I wish to enquire.」

Gerbera who had understood Lily's words threw out another question.

「Since Lily-dono has taught Milord about attribute magic from the start, how shall we go about it? Doing it concurrently or will Milord stop that and start learning body strengthening magic?」

「Regarding that area, I will leave it to Master. I will just enquire whether the plans for being able to withstand the recoil of Asarina attacks are

good or not.」

After the exchange of words, both of them looked towards me.

「What will you do, Master?」

Lily who was the representative inquired.

「Hmm...」

I immerse myself, deep in thought, for a while.

Attribute Magic,

Body Strengthening,

Or possibly both.

I consider Lily and Gerbera's words and decide on the next course of action.

It did not take long to reach a decision.

「I think I will learn body strengthening from Gerbera.」

I will adopt Lily's rough plan.

「Asarina is now lodged in my left hand. If I were to learn attribute magic, I would certainly be able to provide supporting fire and possibly

interception. But, no matter. The insecurity on defence still remains.
——Regarding this, if I were able to strengthen my physical capabilities, my stamina against attacks from opponents will more or less improve. If I wish to keep my distance and attack from afar, relying on Asarina is fine as well.]

I must not misunderstand. What's necessary for me is not only things that are useful in battle.

My job is simply to survive. To survive, it's essential that I do not drag my family into peril.

Due to the fact that I fell into the balloon foxes' trap and almost died, I knew this extremely well.

「Lily has also pointed out that compared to Attribute Magic, Body Strengthening will show results more quickly. In addition, attacks by Asarina will also increase in damage proportionately. Memorizing Attribute Magic later is not a problem.]

[ED note: For that last line, the more proficient he becomes at Body Strengthening the more powerful shot he can release from Asarina without doing damage to himself.]

After my own monologue, I shift my gaze towards Lily with an apologetic look.

「However, it feels like a disservice to Lily, who has been teaching me Attribute Magic until now...]

「Uun(No). The one who had suggested it first, was me. So it's okay not to think too much about it.]

Without looking depressed at all, she displayed a grinning smiling face.

I replied to her with a slight smile as well and this time let my sights shift to Gerbera.

「And Gerbera, I am sorry for taking up your time.」

「Likewise for me, I do not mind it at all. As for me, teaching anything to Milord, makes me really happy」

Looking really happy, Gerbera's translucent white face was dyed crimson red.

Displaying such a childishly frank behaviour, no matter what, Gerbera's expression became cute.

It's certainly not a bad thing.

「Thank you」

While feeling elated after saying words of gratitude to Gerbera, I put pressure on my knees with my hands, in preparation to stand.

「So, since our conversation is settled, from now on...」

「Ano, Mashima senpai.」

I was aiming to start the lessons quickly,

But my words were interrupted.

This voice is from a girl, who until now, was of a listener role during our conversation.

「I am sorry, but may I have some of your time?」

Sitting directly opposite me around the bonfire.

Past the flickering orange of the burning flame, there was the figure of Kato-san staring straight at me.

* * *

To the girl Mana Kato, who is one year my junior, I am indebted.

That day I was kidnapped by the White Arachne, she had saved me. But returning this favor with something of equal value would be impossible. That is how huge this debt is.

I felt my body stiffening.

「... What's wrong, Kato-san?

Thinking about it, it has been a long while since Kato-san has directly conversed with me.

The last time I talked to her was when we gave names to Asarina and Ayame. However, during that point in time, there was a main topic to discuss and everyone contributed equally. I did not chat with any of the girls at all.

Thus, conversing properly with her has really been a long time.

However, I realize it now. Somehow or another, ever since I was unconscious, it seems that I have avoided coming in contact with the girls.

「I am sorry. Although you are starting your training real soon, please stay here for a while.」

「I don't really mind it, but...」

「Thank you very much for I do have things I wish to say to you.」

Having said that, Kato-san, slipped off the slightly dirty sheet she was always clad in and sat straight beside Rose.

It seems like it's a serious conversation.

「Actually, I have a request for Mashima Senpai.」

The contents of her『Wish』she had confessed to me is something that I had not expected.

「If Lily is willing, may I have the chance to be taught magic by her?」

「... Magic?」

「Yes. Even if it's me, if I take the time to learn it, I will be able to learn magic.」

To say if it's possible or not, I would believe it's possible.

Based on the Colony's theory,『 Even if one isn't a Cheat Ability User, they are able to learn magic』 Truthfully speaking, for someone like me, I only became aware of my cheat ability later. Therefore, those 『People who are unable to discover their own cheat ability』will definitely be able to. Moreover, Kato-san is also one of the people who got transferred, so the conditions are fulfilled.

There is a possibility.

However, I am unable to give a agreeable reply immediately.

「You can't agree to it?」

「.....」

Currently, she is unable to discover her own cheat ability. In other words, Kato-san is purely like a normal person (with implied meaning of "Can't be helped") who can memorise magic. Just for the sake of being able to use it for self-defence during the battle with monsters, I believe practicing it is hard.

Just like the past me, even if she took the time to learn magic from the girls, there was no meaning in it.

If we were to consider the situation where Kato-san is taught magic, since the other party is a human, a surprise attack is the only option available.

... For example, surprise attacks from the back.

It can only be used up to that level.

Thinking to this stage, I had hit my head.

(A more elaborate version of thinking too hard.)

Towards my benefactor who has tried her best in order to save me and even risked her life for me, I am somehow having doubts against her

But it's a fact that even if Kato-san had mastered magic, there is no other application for it.

More than that, the doubt that I am holding towards her cannot be easily swept away.

In the first place,『Allowing her to learn magic』 means 『Providing her with a weapon』

If that's possible, in the first place, I do not have to worry about the relationship between me and her.

「.....」

As a result, because I had stayed silent so far, my intent of rejecting her request was conveyed to her.

[ED Note: the translation technically says that his mouth had stiffened as if it was filled with starch.]

Looking at my appearance, Kato-san quietly opened her mouth.

「Recovery Magic.」

「Eh?」

「 I wish to learn Recovery Magic.」

That is a declaration which swept away all my doubt.

「Is it impossible?」

「That is...」

If what she is going to learn is Recovery Magic, she will not be equipped with a weapon.

Within me, I was aware that my vigilance level was dropping.

... If that's the case, there should be no problem in giving her the opportunity to learn magic, I guess?

At least, it is likely that there is room for consideration.

I am halfway changing my thoughts. More than that, I am unable to proceed with my thoughts.

「This conversation, please hold for a while?」

Gerbera was waiting for a time to chip into our conversation.

「Gerbera?」

Her eyebrows drooped as though she was sorry.

That pair of red eyes stared at Kato-san across the flickering flames of the bonfire.

「I am sorry but please consider my request of having Lily-dono by my side to help teach Master magic.」

「Help? In what sense?」

Gerbera who dislikes Kato-san, hardened her expression slightly and answered while receiving Kato-san's gaze, who was waiting for a reply.

「I am a monster. I do not understand a human's way of life. I do not have confidence in whether I will be able to teach Master the knack aptly. On that point, if I were to borrow the strength of Lily who, while being a monster, has memories of being a human I will feel more confident.」

「I see. At least in the beginning, just to make sure, it's better if I attach myself to you, I guess.」

Lily also agrees with Gerbera's opinion.

「You can't teach both of us at the same time?」

To Kato-san's question, Lily shook her head.

「I believe it would be difficult. If Kato-san were to start using magic, first of all, you must start from grasping the sensation of magic.」

No one is able to deal with it if they are unable to see it or grasp it at all.

In order to be able to use magic, first of all, they must be able to feel magic power.

「That itself will take time. Moving at the same pace as Master, isn't it a little too much for you.」

At Lily's comment, Kato-san dubiously frowned.

「If it's about being unable to perceive magic which makes it useless, I can understand. But isn't Mashima Senpai the same as well?」

「I am sorry but regarding this case, Master is special.」

「Special, is it?」

「Un, You can say it's an exceptional case.」

To Lily's exaggerated words, Kato-san showed a slightly ashamed face.

「Speaking of which... Are you able to perceive magic now?」

「That is certainly so. Compared to Kato-san, I have an advantage but it's

not to the extent of being exceptional.」

If you have a certain amount of magical power, anyone will be able to view magic.

Lily, do not use words such as “special” or “exception” if it’s to that extent.

What Lily means is that my circumstances are unique, only to me, through the unexpected entwining of fate.

「A few days back, didn’t Master almost die due to the lack of Magical Power? Thanks to Gerbera providing magic power to him, Master narrowly got back his life. At that point of time, the skill of perceiving magical power was unexpectedly conferred onto Master.」

Listening to Lily’s words, I naturally remembered what happened at that point of time in my mind.

The feeling where my body was filled with magical power from the spider thread despite me on the verge of becoming unconscious can be recalled easily till now.

The feeling where my vessel was being filled, if i were to say, felt really good.

It was precisely because I was drained dry in the first place that I experienced the good feeling of being replenished. It is an experience that cannot be easily reproduced. The times of sharing my pain with another person.

「To begin with, transferring magic power isn’t something that can be

done by anyone. Even if we did it once, we will not know if it will succeed or not the next time. Master was also in an unexpected situation where he was on death's door due to exhausting his magic power. Therefore, you can say that it is an exceedingly exceptional case.」

「Certainly... Then it is not likely for me to be able to get the same result in the same manner.」

If she uses the same shortcut as me, Kato-san will catch up with me.

However, that is an experience granted to me alone. The girls are unable to imitate it.

「I am different from Mashima Senpai. I guess it's a fact that I must do things the normal honest way.」

「That sort of thing. Being unable to perceive Magic power, there is nothing you can do... First of all, you can start with touching people when they are handling magic, grasping the flow of magic. However, what Master is going to be taught now is Body Strengthening. Therefore, in actual fact, he will be moving about while training.」

「If he is doing so, it becomes increasingly harder for me to be in contact with him.」

「In the first place, teaching people with different levels of expertise is hardly effective, isn't it. For this is not about cramming in school or participating in lectures.」

「That is true as well」

As expected, the things we are doing now have no room for margin of error.

「This is regrettable.」

Kato-san also understands our current situation and the reason we have been moving continuously until now. The girl quickly withdrew her request.

「Is this okay?」

「If its to the extent of troubling Mashima senpai and the rest, It's not like I necessarily need to learn magic to begin with.」

Fairy: The author specifically said "want to learn magic" which doesn't really make much sense. It is more like a Japanese Culture (tsundere)

To Lily's question, she answers with no lingering regret.

She had a refreshing expression on her face.

「I'm sorry for asking for something troublesome.」

Kato-san quickly bowed.

「...」

As I gazed at her round head, I felt a bitter feeling in the midst of my heart.

... Is this really okay?

I owe a debt to Kato-san. I have an obligation towards her. I am indebted to her.

If it's that small request, I do not need to hesitate about whether or not to grant it to her.

Although I thought of such things, I was unable to say it out from my mouth.

「Oh no.」

Fairy: "Oh shit" or "Damn".

Lily who look behind her shoulders murmured and forcefully stood up.

「Mu...」

At the same time, Gerbera, besides me stretches out her legs. Ayame, who was sleeping on her stomach flew out and with a roar *Gurururu* stared at the depths of the forest behind me.

Rose had already drawn her axes, thus finishing her battle preparations.

Then Kato-san and I followed suit in noticing the impending disaster.

As I turn towards the direction that my friends are looking, through the dark depths of the forest that enter my field of vision, I see the figures of multiple humanoids coming our way.

Author Note :

◆ばうりんがる的な何か。

前話のあらすじの話ですけど。

◆次回更新は3／28(金曜日)を予定しています。

Chapter 12: A Doll's Wish

In the dark forest, a shadow approached one step at a time. Because my eyesight is only that of a human, it took me a couple seconds to recognize that the shadow had a human outline.

As they push by a bush that is about waist height, I can see that there are five figures. They are about 5 meters away from me. The moonlight and bonfire's glow did not reach them.

Are they a resident of this strange world, or someone who was transferred like me?

I narrow my eyes, but realize immediately that I won't be able to identify them.

They have their heads covered with something like helmets, the back of which spreads out like a skirt to cover their necks. Grated visors completely covers their facial features, dark grey armor protects their bodies.

They look like people in plate armor that I have seen in the movies. It's the attire of soldiers armed to the teeth.

Clicking my tongue, I realize that these guys are going to be troublesome.

I do not know the identity of the other party. Therefore, I don't know their motive.

It was a serious problem that I wasn't able to discover who they were sooner. I wanted to confirm it before contact, if possible, what kind of human being they are, but. . .

.....No. There is no point in regretting it now.

Anyways, I should try to negotiate.

I stand up and try to get in front of Lily; however, she stops me before I can do so.

「What on earth」(Majima)

「Master. Fall back.」(Lily)

I was blocked from going forward by Lily's outstretched arm.

「Even if you try such a thing, There's no point.」(Lily)

The soldiers that Lily saw ahead were completely seen as the enemy.

「Lily? What are you ...?」(Majima)

I put up my guard. I guess we were a bit unlucky. If we were downwind, it would've been impossible for them to notice us.

「Look. You should be able to see soon.」(Lily)

I do what she says, and I strain my eyes to see who these people are, as they continued to get closer.

There stood five soldiers

Then I see it.

「..... Ugh.」(Majima)

Finally, the light from the fire showed『the bodies of the five soldiers』.

The five soldiers all had helmets on. However, one of them had their visor broken so it was easy to see his face.

After confirming the face of the soldier, I involuntarily groaned.

The face bathed in light didn't bear any resemblance of the original person. There was a bite mark on the face, for that matter everything below the jaw was missing. Though it could still be determined that the soldier was caucasian, but barely.

The plate armor should have covered their entire body, but some parts of it were gone, smashed or broken; even one of their arms is missing. Surely this was because of a fatal injury that they had received some time ago.

As soon as I noticed that there were some of them that were walking around, dragging their internal organs on the ground, I could feel the gastric juices welling up in the back of my throat.

Ever since I've come to this world, I've seen some tragic deaths. However, seeing this battered body walking around was truly horrifying.

「Aa, Aa」(Ghoul numero uno)

From the mouth of the dead that was halfway open, came a vacant groan with no meaning. The feel of death stroking my ear made my skin crawl; I was horrified.

.....No doubt.

This had occurred once already in the colony. It was definitely one of those undead monsters. It was almost a taboo name in the colony, the name given to the monster called 「Ghoul」.

No wonder Lily said that it is meaningless. Even when the figure of a person had been barely kept, they are a monsters, there is no room to negotiate otherwise.

「Oh, Oh Aaaaaa! – Tsu. . .」(ghoul)

In the next moment, the five ghouls that had emerged from the forest lunged at us with the speed of wild animals.

「Ugh.」(Majima)

At the sight of corpses lunging at us, my body unintentionally froze.

This was even an issue for those with cheat-like abilities in the expedition corps – undead monsters were to be feared. Humans are already innately hesitant to hurt other humans or things that look like humans. When something unnatural like a corpse coming back to life and attacks, it is only natural that humans would be instinctively be intimidated. But this only applies to people who are human.

My group is made up of monsters, be it humans or whatever. There is no reason for the girls to be afraid.

「Shiiii!」-sfx

The battle-axe Rose threw showed our hostility. One body got an ax to the chest and fell to the ground with a terrible force. Although the armor spared him, the chest piece was split in two, causing serious damage. But even though

the body was still moving, it was pinned to the ground by the thrown ax.

The remaining four ghouls came rushing at us without regards for their downed comrade. They did not a thing such as camaraderie among themselves.

They closed in the distance.

But, Rose immediately started to move at the same time they did.

「I would desirest thou (the undead) not to approach. It is not suitable for Milord to become sick.」 (Gerbera) Gerbera says, as she begins shooting the spider thread.

Silk is littered around to cover a wide range, clinging to the body and various objects of the surrounding soldiers.

High spider thread is sticky, although it was not possible to prevent the movement of the strong force ghoul completely; it was enough to buy time.

「Tear!!」-sfx

The family delay the ghouls as Lily begins to create a magic circle.

— Water magic of the second revised nature,『Three Sword』! — Swords of transparent water jump out and glide in the sky. It pierced the helmet of the soldiers, not missing its mark.

The Ghoul is destroyed — it's brain blown to smithereens — falls to the ground. It was already confirmed in the colony that their brain was their nucleus; this being a reminder.

Now the remaining ghoul—

「A, a, Aaaa~tsu. . .」(Ghoul 5)

— The remaining ghoul completely tears through the spider thread.

「GyaO!」(Ayame) TL kirby: rowr~ :3

It was hit with fireball from Ayame.

Whether it didn't think about avoiding the attack, or whether it did not react because it was a counter, the ball bounds at the ghoul.

A small-scale explosion happens and stops the ghoul in it's tracks.

「Leave it to me!」(Rose)

Rose rushed in with a spare ax

「Shiii! – Tsu」 -sfx

She swings the ax and crushed the soldier's head from the front.

I put down my large shield and let out my breath.

Ten seconds haven't even passed. The ghouls bodies have been destroyed in the process of the fight.

After I put my sword into the first ghoul that Rose pinned to the ground with her ax, we decided to split into two groups; one to inspect the ghouls, and another to set up a new camp.

It's not very hygienic to stay around some rotting corpses. Although they were killed before they could approach, sleeping near various entrails scattered around within arms reach isn't really good for one's health. Physically, but also mentally.

Rose and I decide to inspect the corpses.

Rose was the one that actually touched the corpses. I was only watching the work.

There was enough manpower to make camp, and it was decide a human should be part of the actual inspection.

Kato could fill this role, but I don't think that women should have to observe the inspection of the corpses. Right now she is entertaining Ayame.

「What do you think master, are they people from this planet or ones that transferred here like you?」 (Rose) Rose asks me as she washes their personal items in the water, while I stand behind her.

I nodded, glanced to the bodies which are arranged on the ground.

「Yeah, it looks like they have different features from Kato and I.」(Majima)
The corpse that has been stripped nude appears to be an adult male. The Ghoul that was damaged and was missing his jaw was hard to identify but he

appeared to be caucasian.

「We do look similar . . It could be someone from the west that stumbled into this world.」(Majima) Once I start thinking, I cannot deny the possibility. But at some point there is no point to continue thinking about it.

「At least I don't recognize this language. . .」, I said as I look at the letter one carried near their chest.

It was black, and was stained with blood, but I could at least tell that it was an alphabet that I had never seen before. It is probably the language of this strange world.

If anything, the shape of the character is similar to the cursive script of Kanji. Unfortunately, I don't have enough knowledge to be able to make a distinction.

「That said, I can't say. I can't tell because I don't know the origin of this world's alphabet.」 (Majima) That said, I cannot deny that it could be a language from my world. The corpse doesn't tell me anything. It would be quite unreasonable to receive an answer from it.

I involuntarily let out a sigh.

I thought we were finally going to be able to meet people from this world. Man in this world seems to be hard to find.

「Rose, have you noticed anything?」 (Majima)

「Well. . . .」 (Rose)

Rose Hands me the last item she had been washing.

「A Ring?」(Majima)

「Yes. It looks like they all wore one.」 (Rose)

It seemed to have been attached under the armor. It was made of a ring of thin, round metal that didn't interfere when he clenched his fist.

A small yellow stone was fitted in as decoration, and different white characters were etched on the ring. Possibly, this may been some kind of identification for this military unit.

「Have you noticed anything else?」(Rose)

Rose showed me one of the corpse's hands.

「They don't appear to have rotted much. They were only a few days post mortem.」(Rose) I was about to ask how it happened, when I realized what she was trying to tell me.

「Rose, what happened to... What your saying is these guys were killed a few days walk from here?」(Majima) 「Yes.」(Rose)

Unlike normal humans, these guys were Ghouls now, they probably didn't need to rest. However, even if they didn't stop walking..... It should have taken them less than 10 days to get here. .

I can honestly say that we would be able to make that distance without a problem.

「In other words, it's possible that their base is nearby.」(Rose) 「Even if their base isn't there, I'm sure that there are people there. If not, there should at least be a clue. Now then, the problem is how do we get there.」(Majima) 「Onee-sama(Lily) can probably use Fire Fangs sense of smell to track their scent and follow their footsteps in reverse. Also, they came from the『NorthWest』so we won't have to deviate from our original path.」(Rose) 「The route won't change, if we fail we fail, we'll do what we did before and just keep going North.」(Majima) We were only really going in a general direction so I guess we did ok. It was worth trying.

「Let's talk to Lily. Rose, you did a good job examining.」(Majima) 「Well , it wasn't that great.」 (Rose)

「Don't be modest. They were things I didn't notice.」(Majima) 「No. It's something anyone could notice.」(Rose)

「I see. ... Speaking of which, was there anything useful from what they had on them? 」(Majima) 「There was portable food, but since it's spoilt, it'd be better not to take it」(Rose) 「How about weapons? All their armor seems to be broken, but how about the swords on their waist?」(Majima) 「I inspected them. I don't think there was anything good enough to use.」(Rose) 「I see. It's regrettable, but I guess we won't keep anything... Wait.」(Majima) I was about to say, but on second thought. . . .

「We will only take the ring.」 (Majima)

「The ring?」(Rose)

「Well, if we met someone that knew what the characters meant, it might come in handy.」 (Majima) We might be able to win someone over as an ally with it.

I put the ring I was holding into my pants pocket.

「Well, let's hurry and bury them in a grave or they won't be able to rest.」 (Majima) 「Right.」(Rose)

「Once you've disposed of the weapons and armour, dig a decently deep and large hole..... It seems like it would be best if we increased the manpower. The preparations to leave should be finished by now, go call Lily over.」(Majima) I start walking over to Lily and the others. Because it's dangerous to be too far apart in the forest, they were close enough to hear if I yelled.

Of course even though it was a short distance, it would still be dangerous by myself. Therefore, Rose escorted me back to the fire.

「????」

Except, I don't hear the footsteps. I stopped and looked back 「What is it, Rose?」(Majima)

「Master」(Rose)

I can see that Rose hasn't moved at all yet.

「So um. . . There's something I'd like to say. . . . Is that ok?」(Rose)

「... of course, I don't mind」(Kajima)

Her demeanor felt like she was lost, I knit my brows in amazement. In the first place, it's rare for Rose to state her opinion without me asking for it.

Actually, this is the first time. If you take such an attitude, you'll look suspicious.

Well, there is nothing to be done until I hear what she has to say.

「What do you want to talk about.」(Kajima)

As I urge her, Rose asks while hesitating.

「I would like make a suggestion.」(Rose)

Suggestion? I slightly tilted my head.

.....I wonder if it will be about the soldiers we just examined?

However, it would've been alright if she asked about it earlier.

If not that, then what is it...,...?

Rose clenched her fist and raised her head. She appears to have come to a decision 「It's not really a suggestion, It's about what kato-san asked about earlier.」(Rose) 「..... What?」(Kajima)

「About her handling magic, will you let me be the one to teach her?」(Rose)
Rose brought her fingers together and touched the normal white-tinged mannequin-esque-feeling breast parts that were remade due to the damage received from the battle with the white arachnid.

「If it is only teaching her to grasp the sense of magic, I should be able to help her with at least that.」(Rose) For this first step it is true that the teacher doesn't have to know how to use magic.

For that role, Rose would be sufficient.

Her suggestion hit the mark.

「When I make magic tools, naturally I can sense magic. While I'm working I'll be able to teach Kato how to feel magic.」(Rose) 「It won't hinder your work?」(Kajima)

「Of course not.」(Rose)

I only needed to confirm this point.

I don't think Rose will abandon her work.

She is far too faithful to the task that's been given her.

That's why I'm surprised she is willing to take up the additional task of teaching Kato-san.

「At first I will be teaching her, but later on I plan to have Lily-anesama

properly do the other stuff, is what I was thinking. At that time Master's training should advance, even without Lily-anesama's help.」

.....not bad.

That was my honest impression of Roses suggestion.

Her proposal had neatly countered all the disadvantages that had arisen with teaching Kato. Also as her benefactor I had feeling of wanting to fulfil her demand. This is what i honestly felt.

「.....」(Kajima)

But while I was thinking, I started to hesitate about giving my consent.

– I wonder, is it really okay?

Such a thought dawned upon me, it made me hesitate on my decision.

In theory, it should be ok. If, it was just recovery magic she was learning. Recovery magic couldn't hurt anything.

I'm not giving her a weapon, therefore there's no reason for me to object.

I think it's alright as long as her goal is only to learn recovery magic.

It's as if she has read my mind.

In fact, considering the character of Kato, She may have planned to make her request after ascertaining my reaction.

She limited herself to recovery magic because she knew I had my doubts about her.

That means she properly understood the doubts I have about her.

The person herself realizes her ungrateful manner, becoming bashful... A doubt began to form inside me.

No matter what, I can't completely trust Kato-san because she is human.

It must be unpleasant for her.

Yet she risked her life to help me.

Now to help us out even more she wants to learn recovery magic.

.....why?

why, does she do so much for us.

I don't know what Kato-san is thinking at all.

- Because it is lonely in this world?

- Because there is no one else to rely on?

Before, I tried to guess what she was thinking inside.

I don't actually think it would be that easy to boil it down.

I don't think I can rationalize what she is thinking from only her attitude.

For example, Lily told me, "Just having enough power is fine".

Even for the girls, my family, I would say 『Even if you are useless I won't abandon you』.

The existence of each other is special for us, it's something that is irreplaceable.

That's why even if you are useless you aren't a bother, if you don't rely on us when you are in pain, that would make us suffer even more.

But Kato is different from Lily.

She isn't my family and I'm not her master.

That means I'm not a special existence to her.

I'm merely someone that's protecting her because of a coincidental meeting in the log hut.

It's only natural.

But still, Kato-san without seeking rewards, who could be said to be just another person, risked her life to save me.

It shouldn't be like that.

Rather if it was like that, more than the monsters like Lily, she lacks something as a human being.

If my thoughts are correct she must have some sort of ulterior motive.

It's not clear to me. I don't understand the way she thinks.

Even if she is plotting something I won't be able to guess what it is.

Ah, shit!

(E. my favorite MTL was "..... Yes. Feces.")

Well, this isn't good.

When I ask myself "what are you thinking."

I only have the doubt,"is she plotting something?"

This is already like a sickness for me.

Rather than a sickness it's more like a mental disorder.

(TL Shura: You just realised!?)

(TL Earwig: he is so dense in so many ways...)

I recognize the fact that I've fallen into paranoia.

Thanks to Gerbera I'm able to recognize the morbid part in me.

I recognize that thinking too deep into this is terrible.

However, even though I understand it, that doesn't mean I can stop it.

That's why it's a illness.

「Master」(Rose)

In that moment.

When I was deep in thought and completely still, the voice of a woman with a slightly lower voice called me.

It was the familiar voice of Rose.

Once I realized that, my consciousness was pulled out from that train of thought.

I raise my eyes that had been staring at the ground.

Then I involuntarily widen my eyes.

That's because I see Rose with her head lowered.

「Please Master?」 said Rose as she bows her head.

「Please I want to help her with her wish Master.」(Rose)

「....」(Kajima)

I was stunned.

I never expected Rose to say these things.

I can't figure out how I should act.

「....」(Kajima)

As a result I remained silent.

Rose, misunderstanding, lowered her head even more.

「I understand I am being presumptuous. It's reasonable that you are angry. I will respectfully receive the scolding. However, however, please...」(Rose) 「W-Wait a second I'm not actually angry.」(Kajima)

I hurry and deny Rose's hasty conclusion.

It'd be impossible for me to be mad.

I couldn't get angry at her for something like this.

That's right, that couldn't possibly be it.

Because, this is something I wanted as well.

When I still couldn't talk to Rose I thought "what does she want? What does she wish of me? I want to hear it from her." is what I had wished for.

But for her first desire to be "I wish to grant Kato-san's wish." I wasn't expecting this, but that doesn't change the fact that I should be happy about it.

「For Rose to have an opinion and state her desire. For me, this is a really wonderful thing.」(Kajima) This is how I really felt. But on the other hand.

I had asked her.

「If you do not mind, will you tell me?」(Kajima)

「Why are willing to go so far as to bow your head for Kato-san?」(Kajima)

Something I didn't know about had changed Rose.

I naturally wanted to find out what it was.

「That is...」(Rose)

Rose fumbled for the right word.

Even though it's me I couldn't stop thinking of her Doll heart to be an inorganic substance.

Ah, but there is no mistake I had such thoughts.

Her shyness gave her the appearance of a teenage girl.

But also, that might have been the reason. (TL E: Because she is a teenager)

「That's because she's my friend, Master.」(Rose)

Rose clenches her fist to her chest and answers my question.

The answer she gave me put a mysterious thump in my chest.

「A friend?」(Kajima)

I recalled the figures of Rose and Kato-san getting along well.

I just realized they had been talking like two good friends.

That could explain the change in Rose.

A Person can be changed for better or worse depending on their friends.

Even if that person is a doll.

This is only the tip of the iceberg in the ways that Rose will change, who has come to express her opinions and desires.

As I look at Rose, Kato-san's existence is a good influence on her growth. It seems at the very least Kato-san is a good friend for Rose.

「I understand.」(Kajima)

It felt like my previous dark thoughts never happened and I could talk now.

「Rose, you can teach Kato-san the basics of magic manipulation.」(Kajima) 「Is that ok?」(Rose)

「yes.」(Kajima)

Rose can't seem to hide her surprise as she asks that.

I nod in reply.

While doing that she grabbed my hand that became quite sweaty.

...I could still remember that as the colony collapsed, the ugly smiles of the classmates that beat me.

The me right now doesn't seem to be able to get over the dark memories that haunt me.

Though it's pathetic, I understand it well.

Because I'm a human I can only be this strong.

That's why the fact that I don't trust Kato-san, because she's a human, wouldn't change.

but....

「I believe in Rose. With you nothing bad will happen.」(Kajima) Rose probably didn't understand my real meaning.

She probably thought that if she taught Kato-san that it would all go smoothly.

But that's ok.

The words I said to her didn't really convey my intentions.

I could only surrender to the meaning of my own words.

If its Rose, I can believe in her.

Kato-san is her friend.

She is saying that she wants to help her first friend.

It's not only that.

As for me, Kato-san is Rose's precious friend.

Isn't it natural to accommodate her?

「I'll leave Kato-san to Rose. Is that alright?」(Kajima)

This is the best I could do as repayment to Kato-san, I had to do my best to

reason about it.

「...」(Rose)

I could tell that my dark thoughts had stopped.

I slowly breathe out.

Rose bowed her head again.

「Thank you master.」(Rose)

「Don't worry about it, I should be the one thanking you.」(Kajima) Because she didn't understand what I meant, Rose looked up at me curiously.

「I'm sorry master, But what does that exactly mean?」(Rose) 「If you don't understand, that's fine.」(Kajima)

I lightly replied to her while chuckling. We need to call Lily to get help digging holes.

Rose followed behind me.

「...Oh, right.」(Kajima)

After going a few steps, I stop and look back over my shoulder.

「Well that's what Kato-san wanted, but is there anything that Rose wants for herself?」(Kajima) Even If I thank Rose, she won't understand what I'm thanking her for.

Then let's repay her for unknowingly helping me, by doing her a favor. That's what I was thinking at least.

「You're doing really well. Is there something I can get you.」(Kajima)
「Something else...?」(Rose)

「That's what I'm saying, you don't have to hold back. Please think of something for yourself.」(Kajima) I asked her again. I'm half expecting her to decline anything.

Rose was still holding herself back, even though I showed the intention of following through with my words. She answered while I was pondering my own words.

「Then.... Only one thing.」(Rose)

She seems out of her element. In contrast from just before she's completely different. if it's for herself, she becomes very nervous.

「I don't mind if it's just a few days, please give me time to make things other than weapons.」(Rose) 「"Give me some free time" is it?」(Kajima)

When I think about it, I've been having her work night and day since we met. Compared to the other members, Lily is able to find time to be intimate with me and enjoys spending time with Gerbera.

Rose doesn't seem to be able to relax much.

This was an oversight of mine.

Rose probably needs time for herself as well.

Fortunately we aren't in an urgent situation.

Also, if we mass produce armaments now our luggage will become bulky and slow us down.

We don't really have that much room, so there's no point in producing too many.

Though 'someone who makes stuff even when they are free' seems to describe Rose.

「I don't mind, do what you want.」(Kajima)

「T-Thank you.」(Rose)

Though she is an expressionless doll, when I show my approval she seems happy.

While I was trying to say these things casually I was happy with her reaction.

「Anyways, what are you going to make?」(Kajima)

「T-That is...」(Rose)

「Yes?」(Kajima)

I wonder.

Rose's body seems to have stiffened because of my question.

I don't understand why my question would upset her.

「For that... well..... something cute?」(Rose)

「What is it, that cute thing?」(Kajima)

I didn't understand what Rose was trying to say.

Perhaps she is embarrassed?

If that's the case, I found out something that rose is trying to make was embarrassing for her. The hint was that it is a『kawaii thing』

「Even a pretty doll will do?」(Kajima)

「Yes. That's right.」(Rose)

I was saying it only as a joke, but she quickly responded positively to it.

This is surprising.

The Rose tonight never ceases to amaze me.

But I'm happy because it was a good surprise.

I seem to have come to know a new side to Rose. This has made me happy.

「Even rose is a girl huh」(Kajima)

「Ah, hai. Um, more or less.」(Rose)

Rose is behaving unusually suspicious.

She doesn't seem to be shy anymore.

But she doesn't seem to be her normal honest self either.

But this kind of Rose isn't bad, I guess.

Though if she really is shy, it would be bad to drag this topic out.

Thinking on that, I decided to end this topic.

But I added one last thing.

「Show me when it's done.」(Kajima)

I was interested in what Rose wanted to make.

「Wah, yes. I understand. When I finish I'll let you see.」(Rose) 「I look forward

to it.」(Kajima) I reply with a smile and start walking again.

Only to walk a few steps and stop.

After a little more time I ponder over the conversation.

Chapter 13: Small path in the forest

The next day, we began to follow the ghoul's footprints.

Although it was meandering slightly, the Ghouls seem to have come straight from the northwest.

Even though Mimicking the Fire Fang's sense of smell wasn't as good as the real thing, we were still were able to follow them easily from the blood and the many tracks they left behind.

It's looking like we were getting closer to humans, I felt like I needed to think about how to interact with the people here.

While sitting around the fire one night, I brought up the idea with the family.

"I think when we find people it should be Lily, Kato, and I who first make contact. Everyone else should hang back."(Kajma) Should I say "as expected?" Everyone started to raise their objections.

"What!? Milord, what does thou meanest by that!?"(Gerbera)

"Master will be in danger. Please, please permit us to accompany you"

"Even if you say that. There isn't any helping it. Besides Lily, you guys can't hide that you're monsters."(Kajma) I understand the objecting Rose and Gerbera's feelings, even I don't want to part with them.

But when having contact with humans, it's my firm belief to lie about my ability. Since I don't know what kind of reaction people will have with monsters. I shouldn't show off my power lightly. More so to the other transfers. This way it can be one of my hidden cards.

By the very nature of it, the people that I can bring are limited.

Because Asarina can't detach from my left arm she has to come along and the only other one that I can bring is Lily.

At this point my family would surely understand my reasoning, whether they

agree or not is another matter.

“Master should bring this mistress! Master might be in danger! One dost not seriously think one can carefreely walk through the forest, right!?”(Gerbera)
Gerbera is a little too excited, I could hear the sound of her spider legs.

I glance down at the lower part of the spider body.

“Even if you say that, I won’t be able to cheat. What exactly are you thinking?”(Kajma) “This one thinks this one should tear off the bottom half, Tis only the upper part I doth not looketh different than a human’s!”() “... that’s impossible.... What kind of horror movie is that?”(Kajma) (TL E: lol) The most fundamental part wasn’t solved.

As expected even a white arachne wouldn’t survive without its lower half.

“B-But...”(Gerbera)

Did she realize she said something impossible? Gerbera raises a groan.

She has been very emotional today. She probably understands it with her head, but when her blood gets boiling she can’t think clearly.

Persuading her would probably take time.

Of all things Ayame who had been resting on the white spiders head gave a snort.

“kuu-!”()

Ayame who had been languidly lying on Gebrera’s head gets up and energetically Jumps off.

With everyone’s line of sight on her, she throws herself at Lily.

No, to say that she jumped would probably be a better choice of words.

Lily catches that small body immediately.

She struggles within Lily’s hands, escapes, and shoves her head down Lily’s shirt and crawls all the way in.

“W-wait, Ayame?”()

If she keeps sliding down her shirt she'll eventually fall to the ground . Lily must have realized this since she started holding down the hem of her shirt.

While Ayame made noises and turned into a stored-in-bag state, she stuck out her head from Lily's chest.

Her cute and round eyes reflected Gerbera.

Gerbera's red eyes became wide.

"Thou art going in my stead?"(Gerbera)

When Gerbera asked, Ayame snorted to reply

Ayame looks at her with shining eyes as if saying "leave it to me". Apparently, she's serious.

"..... You are the size of a palm. But, it still might not be possible to hide you under clothes. "(Kajma) I unintentionally interrupted their conversation .

Actually part of Lily's chest is now sticking out so much it looks fake. Lily may have a great chest but it's unreasonably big now.

But a place to hide the kit came from an unexpected place

"It might not be so, master." (Lily)

As Lily said that she puts her hands underneath her shirt..

She holds Ayame with one hand and rolls up her shirt with the other.

Hear smooch stomach and pretty naval were exposed. I could now see the bottom of two globes slightly poking out underneath the shirt, with no bra in sight. As I watched, her skin slowly lost its flesh color and turned into a clear liquid substance "If I do this,"(Lily)

When Lily changed her stomach back into flesh there was a small indent there. Lily put Ayame into the indent.

In my head I begin to applaud, it was like street magic. This method can hide the extra mass that is Ayame. It was the transportation method that only Lily, who was a slime, could do. It may be slightly tight, but Ayame should be able to endure it.

Ayame looked over at Gerbera as if to ask "How is it?"

Gerbera who still looked slightly doubtful put on a smile and walked over.

Because of Ayame's behaviour, Gerbera seems to have regained her rationality.

Gerbera gently patted the area where Ayame's head should be.

Ayame gives a snort at Gerbera's fingertips. Ayame is starting to appear very dependable.

A drop of water falls on the outstretched hand and I look up.

"Rain?" (Kajma)

The clouds are a dark color hanging above the trees.

This is bad.

* * *

We were making use of Lily's sense of smell as we followed the ghouls tracks. The rain is going to wash out the scent of the ghouls. We are going to lose one of our clues.

Of course it's rained since we moved from our first base. but, it hasn't rained in awhile so I got careless.

Even if I took that into consideration there still wasn't anything we could have done.

It would be regrettable to lose a clue that took so much effort to get. So we hurry on ahead.

We encountered many monsters with different degrees of difficulty but quickly defeated them so we could be on our way quickly.

We have come all this way and still don't really know where the ghouls are from. In exchange we haven't seen any fire fangs and magic puppets.

Around noon it began to rain very hard. It would be hard to track the ghouls on sense of smell alone.

But that wasn't such a big problem anymore.

We found something interesting.

In an animal trail we found a boot print. It was trace of people.

While staying cautious we followed the game trail that was half buried in the grass.

We then found weapons, the same type the ghouls had, scattered around a wide area. There was also trampled shrubs and damaged trees. They were signs that there had been a battle here. We couldn't find any of the soldier's corpse laying around. It could be that the bodies were eaten or that the survivors carried them away. But in case of the latter wouldn't they have carried away the weapons also.

Any ways this must be the path that person (Mr boot-print-san) was using. The trail must lead back to their home. We finally found a new clue.

But we still didn't follow it haphazardly. We decided to stay in the forest and followed parallel to the trail. This way we can observe any people we find and avoid contact if we want.

By this time it has been over a week since we first made contact with the ghouls.

* * *

The lighting is dim, even for being in the forest. It's still early morning. I haven't even had breakfast yet. Why am I getting up so early? It's so I could train my body strengthening magic.

“__”

I was conscious of existence of the magic in the container, that is me.

The magic begins to muddily move through my body.

It lacks shape and is kinda ugly compared to the magic that Gerbera uses.

If Gerbera's magic is like a torrent, mine is like mud that could be washed away by a stream.

Even then, if I flow my magic through my body like this, the effect should be obvious.

For example, right now my grip strength could probably rival a 2 meter tall

body builder.

Still this is only the limits of a human, but my strength and stamina is steadily rising.

Even with that, just having strength is meaningless, there is still a need to learn how to control it.

“HA-”(Kajma)

I stepped in and swung my sword

This is really hard. I can just use strengthening magic, but if I think about it my hands and feet movements would just become clumsy and sluggish. For several days I was falling over while trying to run. It's a memory I'd like to forget about.

The sword tore through the air. The speed of the sword has become reasonable even without magic enhancements unfortunately my arms don't have the muscle memory yet, I'm only at the level where I can use a sword as if it was a club. Despite that, a deadly weapon is still a deadly weapon. It's inherently dangerous to handle one poorly.

The spider leg that comes flying to counterattack me is stopped at the last second by the shield on my left arm. The leg makes a tearing sound as it digs into the ground. Just like that my left arm went numb.

While I lose my concentration, my leg is tripped up. My back hits the ground hard. Recently i've been able to take a hit pretty well.

I catch my breath as I roll out of the way, a spider legs pierces through the place where I was a couple of seconds ago. Dangerous, the fight almost ended there.

I feel an impact on my chest. I let my guard down.

Gerbera has 8 legs, each of which work like independent creatures.

My lung gets the air knocked out and crushed. The pain and oppressiveness attacks me at the same time and I nearly lose consciousness. The fall alone nearly kills me. After I have fallen it is hard to stand back up.

“N-not yet!”(Kajima)

While staying in place, Gerbera attacks me again. The attack was so relaxed that Gerbera yawned as she dealt the blow. But it's such a sharp blow that I can't stop it unless I give it my full attention.

The attack doesn't make it through but I can feel the fatigue building in my left arm every time the spider leg hits my shield. I'm laying against the ground my entire body aches in pain. Despite the pain, if I show any openings the spider leg will come in and knock me out. I eject the contents of my stomach, and nearly faint from the pain. This is about the same as my other training sessions.

"Ugu-!"(Kajma)

My fatigue has built up and I think my foot has finally broke. By mental strength alone I stay in place, my experience told me that I could still expect another attack. I force my left arm to stay up.

Asarina, the Vine that grows from my left hand, flew into the air like a whip. Asarina closes the distance in the blink of an eye. Every one out of ten times my luck shows, Gerbera jumps back successfully evading the vine. I feel dizzy from the lack of oxygen, But I wipe my sweat off and grasp my sword's hilt again. I step forward.

"Ha-!"(Kajma)

-Flash—

My sword was hit free.

I can feel it leaving my hand.

"...Ha?"(Kajma)

I was stunned staring at empty space.

"Milord, the end's finally here."(Gerbera)

A light impact hit my back. I seemed to have been hit by one of her legs. Though this has happened so many times I didn't need to see it. It was a familiar feeling already. With that my stance breaks. That small amount force was enough force to slam my face forward into the ground. I could only watch as the ground rapidly approached my face.

-Bang!-

“Uwaaa-!”(Kajima)

My idiotic scream resounded throughout the still dark forest.

As my joints ached, I turned my body with my weakened arms.

I’m tired, I look at the sky in the forest as I breathed raggedly.

“Are you ok, Milord?” (Gerbera)

The me, who turned over, looked towards her direction, she appeared with her white hair hanging and a gentle expression on her face. She has an anxious expression on her face.

“I-I’m oka-! *coughs!*”(Kajima)

“Let’s first get your breathing under control.”(Lily)

Gerbera folded her legs and sat down next to me. I can feel the love flowing out of her human arms as she cradles my head.

Lily, who was watching us, came over.

She changed her lower form to the bed I use at night. With that form she lifts me up so I could lay on her.

After checking my body and healing me with magic she gave a contented nod.

“Ok, everythings is healed.”(Gerbera)

“Doing this every morning, sorry.”(Kajima)

“It’s okay.”

Lily’s upper body which sprouted out near my head, smiled and stared at my face. The me right now looks like I’m getting a lap pillow from Lily. Although it’s a different variant. The elasticity on the back of my head is of a girl’s thigh, but at the same time the cool feeling is that of a slime.

Since she transformed she wasn’t wearing anything on her lower body, although she looked like she was sitting in seiza her lower body was still that of a slime, from another’s point of view this might be a amazing position to be in.

(TL/N: seiza is the japanese formal sitting posture, commonly seen when

drinking tea or in kendo matches.) “Master does have some skill now.”(Lily)

“I only remember falling down pitifully though.”(Kajima)

“Didn’t the number of times you’ve fallen decreased?”(Lily) “...”

“I’m joking, I’m joking. You’re progressing very smoothly master.”(Lily)

“Milord is getting stronger, thou art progressing faster than I first thought.”(Gerbera) Making side glances at us, I could hear Gerbera’s leg moving. I can’t help but make a wry smile.

“To casually avoid those, even if you say that...”(Kajima)

Even if you say that I’ve gotten stronger. It doesn’t feel that way.

I let out a sigh, it is a natural thing

“I understood how to handle magical power somehow”(Kajima) When I fill my whole body with magic, my body starts to creak. The magic starts to move like sticky mud. I’m happy that, with help of Gerbera’s teaching, I’m able to achieve body strengthening magic. It’s probably like when a baby first learns how to walk.

——With this I can fight!

The feeling of excitement made me realise that, even though I am a 17 year old man, I still yearn for pure strength.

It was Gerbera who quickly brought an end to my excitement.

Battle training with her, in terms of using magic power in body strengthening magic nothing has really changed. I can’t even graze her with my sword, and even with Asarina I couldn’t bind her. Obviously holding back, I dodged her legs and got hit in the back, no matter how agitated I was it would immediately disappear.

“.....”

“Master are you depressed?”(Lily)

As I remembered the state of training from this morning, Lily wraps her hands around my cheeks.

To my feverish body, the feel of this chilly girl is pleasant.

It's a bit depressing, it was definitely uncool.

When I answer, Lily comes around to peek at my eyes. There was a smile on her face.

"But, that face seems to be very happy"(Lily)

"...yeah, I guess."(Kajima)

I return a nod. It's a fact that when you don't have talent it can feel hollow, but it's also an enriching feeling.

In this world that has a mysterious power called magic, there's nothing for an ordinary guy like me to do except go forward one step at a time. I understood that, so I wasn't seriously depressed.

It is a lucky thing that I can be in this dangerous world and still advance slowly.

Besides there's someone watching me with a smile. It would be too greedy to wish for more than this "Let's have breakfast soon"(Kajima)

I give Lily's cheeks a pat as I get up. Lily wipes the mud off of me. We don't lack in the necessity of clothes thanks to Gerbera. But all the clothes made by her are white.

Because the place I fell today was exceptionally bad, this time I was very dirty. I think it would be best if I changed before I ate.

I was glancing around while I thought about such things. What entered my view was a white-ish doll, and a girl wrapped in a blanket seated together.

"Oh, So you were also awake Kato-san?"(Kajima)

"Good morning, Kajima-Senpai."(Kato)

As I was approaching I called out to them. Kato released her palms from Roses upper arm, turned, and cordially bowed to me.

She is training to learn magic, just like I am, getting ready for the future. Though for her she is just touching the place where Rose uses magic to create magic tools. She is trying to feel the flow of magic "Any progress?"(Kajima)

"It's difficult. I'm inexperienced even if I can feel it, I still don't know how to

take in magic power.”(Kato) Kato has a bitter expression. For some reason it doesn’t seem to be going well for her.

“That’s inevitable didn’t you expect it to be difficult from the beginning?”(Kajima) “Yes. But it’s been over a week and there hasn’t been any progress.”(Kato) “That’s same for me.”(Kajima)

“ Kajima-senpai is able to move now. I was watching out of the corner of my eye and your movements are starting to look good.”(Kato) Is that really true? No, she’s probably trying to comfort me, it is just social etiquette. If it was someone I was intimate with like Lily then maybe. But we aren’t that close yet.

The sense of distance could be something like “ a friends friend”. Or maybe even “ the friends father”.

Still we are talking better now compared to before.

“ Well if you need any help, as long as I’m around feel free to ask me and I will help Kato-san as much as I can.”(Kajima) “Thank you.”(Kato)

It’s a compromise... though I don’t know how much I can help.

There was also a separate meaning. Kato-san had to learn it in a certain amount of time. We need to find humans, not just supplies. Once we do we will entrust Kato-san to them. We have already found traces of humans. Depending on the situation we may be parting soon. With her being a friend of Rose, I’ve decided to treat her as nice as I can. I will try to repay her kindness to Rose by then. That is my current thoughts “Can I have a bit of your time, master?”(Rose)

Because Rose called out to me, I snapped out of my own thoughts. I looked away from Kato-san to Rose.

“There is something I want to give you. I was working on it with Gerbera and finished it last night.”(Rose) “!?, Really!?”(Kajima)

“Yes, would you check it?”(Rose)

Rose handed me a white cloth, carefully folded. I can see when I open it, it is a long sleeve undershirt. I can see that the sewn cloth was made from Gerbera but it was integrated with Rose’s armor plates. This is made with the pseudo-damascus steel, even though it is thin I can expect some good defence from it.

“This is good. Better than I expected.”(Kajima)

“Thank you very much.”(Rose)

I wanted this ready for when we encountered other humans. I’m happy it was ready in time. I’m going to give it a trial run immediately.

“But before that, I think I should wash off my sweat first before I wear it.”(Kajima) “That might be best.”(Rose)

Rose turned to Lily.

“Then would onee-sama prepare the bath. I will prepare the fire in the meantime.”(Rose) “Alright, then would Gerbera help Rose with the preparations. Gerbera why are you being so restless?”(Lily) Lily has a curious expression. Gerbera was getting impatient, and looking around restlessly without thinking.

“I can’t see Ayame.”(Gerbera)

“Now that you mention it...”(Kajima)

As I look around I can’t see the young fox.

Ayame had a very free and wild spirit about her. She can usually be seen playing within eye sight.

Though I think It’s a child’s job to play. Gerbera seems to be fairly worried.

“I surely thought that she was with Rose.”(Gerbera)

“No. I thought elder sister Lily was keeping her occupied for me.”(Rose) “I don’t know...oh?”(Lily)

The same time that Lily was speaking there was a rustle in the bushes.

Speak of the devil... Just as we were talking of Ayame she appears.

She won’t settle down even after she comes out from under the bush. Once she sees me, she runs straight to me “What’s the matter?”(Kajima)

She bit the hem of my pants and began to pull me. I stare at the fox and can feel her excitement. She looks up at me with wide eyes, and appears startled.

“What did you find”(Kajima) (TL: Is Timmy stuck in the well?!) Ayame stopped

pulling on my clothes and let go.

Apparently that was the right answer.

Is Ayame's sense of smell the same as Lily's Mimicked fire fang sense?

While we were training she might have found something.

Something.

I could feel something. With a firm voice I give out instructions.

"Everyone get ready for departure. Be aware of your surrounding. Ayame is going to guide us." (Kajima) Breakfast is postponed. We left immediately to begin the search. Lily was right behind Ayame incase there was any problems. She can perceive the danger faster than anyone.

How many minutes have we walked?

Ayame stopped at Lilys feet and reported with a suppressed voice.

"I found it." (Lily)

Here is the path that we had been traveling next to for the last couple of days. I hide in the shadow of the trees and look onto the path.

There! After a long time I can see it, the figure of a human.

Chapter 14: Protection and Information

Part 1

I looked into the small open space a little ways away from the gap in the trees that I watched from.

A group of approximately 20 people were taking a break there.

About ten boys and girls were wearing school uniforms.

In addition to that, the rest were soldiers dressed in the same full-body armor and in a similarly-sized group as the soldiers who attacked as ghouls, the soldiers resting while still paying attention to the surroundings.

“.....So, students and the people of this world huh?”

I expected to run into one or the other, but to run into them when they're together...

To be honest, this development is a little unexpected.

However, the surprise itself isn't very big. This is because the situation is plausible enough if I think about it.

“It looks like other people have come in contact with this world’s residents before us”

“It seems so”

I chimed in on Lily’s words.

What I should pay attention to now is what kind of position the soldiers are in and what kind of relationship they have with the students who came from the same world as me.

In other words, it reveals what kind of relationship we can build. In that sense, the amount of information obtained by observation increases, so this unexpected situation is more convenient for us.

“Master, I think that they are probably a part of the『Stay Behind Group』.”

Pulling the hem of my clothes Lily drew my attention.

“After all, if they were cheat-users from the 『Scouting Corps』, everyone shouldn’t have such a tired looking face”

She said and when I looked to confirm, it seems so. While I can’t see much of their facial expressions due to being too far away, a lot of the boys that are around the same age as me seem dead tired.

“Survivors from after the colony collapsed?”

It's the students who are in the same situation as Kato-san; unaware of their own cheat ability.

First of all I am surprised that this many had survived. Also, although only small, I came to be aware of a feeling of relief that filled my chest.

That there are people who survived. I am relieved at that fact.

This part is same as what happened with Kaga.

I still can't believe in humans and I don't think that I want to dare joining them without a purpose in doing so either. My priorities are clear with Lily and the others at top, and I will not forgive those that oppose us.

However, having said that, I doubt I'm going to end up thinking so destructively as to believe that everyone should just die.

While it might be a half-assed opinion, I think that it's fine like that.

Living is much better than dying.

That kind of thinking that everyone seems to have is still alive within me.

I believe that this kind of thought process is important. Because, after all, if I lose my feelings as a person, I would probably end up eventually thinking of Lily and the others the same as I would a tool.

“.....But, they did well surviving through that.”

Anyway now's not the time to be immersed in such sentiments.

As if she could see through everything that I was just thinking about, Lily came to face me.

“I'm sure they have held their breath and have lived in this forest in hiding until now. At some point during that they were put under the protection of these soldiers.”

“If that is true, they must have had considerable luck and have been led by an excellent leader.”

“Perhaps, they were protected by a cheat user. There's no way that the Scouting Corps that remained behind in the colony would have been annihilated.”

“Aah there was such a possibility.”

I continued observing them while talking with Lily.

In the open space, several students who still had some energy left talked to each other and seemed to converse with the soldiers as well. Due to the distance I couldn't hear their voices, but at least I don't see any abuse.

At this point, the danger from contact with them doesn't seem to be too high.

If so... For example, yes. Would it be possible to ask them for guidance to a human settlement of some kind?

If so, what should I do to get to that ends?

Although if necessary it would be okay to wait for the next opportunity, wherever possible, I don't want to make any mistakes.

I absolutely wanted to know information concerning what circumstances led to those students cooperating with this world's soldiers. If I could get that information then there would be room for negotiation.

Or there is the option of following them as it is. Even they wouldn't wander in this forest eternally. When following them while hiding, we should naturally arrive at a village.

"What should we do, Master?"

"... For now, let's make it so that it would be okay for us to come into contact with them at any time."

It would be best to take measures, such that no matter where the chips fall we would be prepared. Preparations for this have already been made in advance.

I quickly removed the shirt made by Gerbera, and put on the undergarments that I had just recently had Rose work on.

And I put the jersey on top.

This was the first preparation.

I intend to conceal my ability to lead monsters, but if I do that then the first problem would be my clothes. Because if I'm wearing Gerbera's work as before, there is a possibility that other transferees like me may suspect the source.

But with that being the case, just wearing a jersey for defense would make me nervous in a dangerous situation.

And so to solve that problem, I got these undergarments that I had Rose prepare. This can be worn under the jersey, and has a reasonable degree of defense.

I further wrapped a slim cloth prepared by Gerbera around my left arm.

Naturally this is to hide Asarina who grew on the back of my left hand.

"Goshu, sama! Sama!"

"Sorry, for making you feel cramped."

"Sama!"

Because it's a cloth woven with Gerbera's spider thread, it also has a

reasonably high defense. In addition to that on my left arm there's still the remains of the burn marks from the encounter with the Balloon Foxes. So it wasn't unnatural for it to be wrapped in a bandage.

“Next is the sword.”

As with the clothes, there's also the possibility of suspicion in the『Pseudo Damascus Steel Sword』.

Therefore I was also prepared for this.

I had Rose prepare a blade facade resembling a normal Magical Puppet sword.

In short the sheath was camouflaged to look like a wooden sword.

The plan is that by fitting the『Pseudo Damascus Steel Sword』in this, it would look like it is just a normal Magical Puppet-made sword.

.....Although it's easy to say, of course it is only possible if you have Rose's ability to prepare such things.

As it seemed like she hadn't thought of using this kind of trick, she looked utterly impressed by my request.

I still recall the uncomfortable feeling due to being praised by her.

For Rose, making things is, in the end, just part of her nature, and while it might be something that a modern person accustomed to books, manga, games, *etc.* like me could come up with on the spot, here it might seem like the invention of the century.

Moreover, the plan that I conveyed somewhat visually, had several amendments made to it the next day, but even so, it doesn't seem feasible in terms of applicability and plausibility.

Anyway, since the usual equipment in the colony were the weapons gained from defeating the Magical Puppets, it shouldn't seem suspicious as long as it's disguised. Similar coating was applied to Rose's meticulously made black shield.

I also didn't forget to make my clothes and body suitably dirty. This is because it would be unnatural to be too clean.

I put the backpack I got from Kaga on my back, without forgetting to put the keepsake ring from the soldier who became a ghoul in the pocket of the my jersey. The preparations are complete.

Lily and Kato-san who accompanied me also finished their preparations and we again returned to the monitoring of the humans.

"Still, they have taken quite a long break."

"I think they are considering the weakened students"

"Perhaps Well it's fine. During that time, let's try to do everything we can manage."

We also made effective use of this time and have made a few plans for future actions.

The situation changed after dozens of minutes passed since we first found them.

“A new member?”

A group of about ten soldiers came from the other side of the path.

The direction they came from was the same as us, the South . While they were all marching down in foot, they were moving at such a pace that it was hard to believe they were equipped with plate armor

They joined the group that were originally resting in the clearing. I thought that they were taking a unusually long break, but apparently they were waiting for the other group to catch up.

“.....Hmm?”

I noticed that there was one heavily-armed soldier in dull-colored armor with a black banding pattern on a white background.

Several soldiers are greeting him. They seemed to have received instructions. Perhaps he is a leader of this group.

I was watching him while thinking and was startled shortly after.

He moved his head, covered by a white helmet, around, as if he were looking for something, and as I thought that, his gaze stopped on us.

But that is impossible. He couldn't have been able to see us.

We're a considerable distance away and are hiding in the bushes as an additional precaution. Even if we are able to see them in the clearing ahead, they should be no way for them to see us.....

However, my prior judgment was overturned at once.

"Who are you!"

A voice of challenge rang out through the forest, leaving me with a stabbing feeling in my heart, causing me to shrink back.

"We were found !?"

I thought that it was ridiculous/impossible, but it would seem that the soldier leader was convinced that we were here. While facing us, he unsheathed the sword that hung at his waist.

"Everyone, watch out! There is something targeting us!"

The clear voice rang out through the forest, sounded young, almost childish. Perhaps he is that same age as me, maybe even younger.

The warning he declared incited a fluster of hurried movements about the clearing.

The people, who like us, traveled from another world, let out a scream and gathered together in one location while the soldiers created a protective perimeter around them.

The encirclement was completed immediately.

It appears to be a defense oriented formation. This is probably because many of the students would become a burden.

Fortunately for us it doesn't seem like they will raise their swords and come charging at us any time soon, but that won't necessarily be the case forever.

Lily who was watching the clearing while sticking to my arms hugged them slightly tighter.

"What should we do, master?"

"...Since we've been discovered it doesn't look like we have a choice but to come out."

Unfortunately with this, tailing them to a human village is no longer a viable choice.

The other option — I could've negotiated with them to have them take us to a human village and I would be able to gather information on them. However, this can't be helped either. Let's give up.

I would have had to make the decision eventually, and this just means that now is the time to do it. We just have to prepare for the worst.

"There seems to be fellow classmate there, that should be enough for negotiations."

Of course, the worst case scenario is that they will turn their swords on us.

Although we are fellow students, they won't necessarily accept us.

In the strategy meeting we already decided for Gerbera to swoop in if things take a turn for the worse. I think Gerbera can easily defeat the enemy, but we will focus on causing a disruption and escaping at once. Rose would be in charge of the escape route.

At this point, I tell the others that I will stay behind.

"Rose, Gerbera. It'll only be for a short time, but this is goodbye. Do everything as discussed in the meeting "

"Understood. I pray for your safety."

"Please guard my lord, Ayame."

Rose lowered her head and Ayame stroked by Gerbera peeked her nose out and crawled back into the space under Lily's jersey.

Now the preparations for departure are complete.

I review the situation one last time, to confirm that there aren't any oversights.

No matter how wary I am, you can never be too cautious. For my family I cannot die, I must stay alive so that they can also live longer.

Therefore I've planned in advance, and have made preparation as well. All that is left is for me to do my best here and now.

"...Alright, let's go."

Yeah. I think that's all there is to it.

But perfect preparation is impossible. No matter what oversights are a possibility. It is already an inevitability.

One of these accidents is occurring now.

"Kato-san?"

Behind, Rose gave a suspicious voice.

I caught sight of the figure of Kato-san who remained standing in the place when I reflexively looked back to see if something was wrong.

As I said before, she was going to meet them with us. However, after taking the first step, she had stopped walking for some reason.

“A, e..... ?”

Why is it? The person herself seems to not understanding the reason, as well. A strange voice leaked out of the girl's throat.

Soon it was filled with panting that seemed to be painful.

Kato-san's face that was looking at me was pale.

No. It is different.

I immediately noticed my misunderstanding.

Kato-san was not watching me. She had become frozen, staring over my shoulder at the people we planned to make contact with.

“.....Ah”

The body of Kato-san leaks a small scream, she is unexpectedly shaking.

“Kato-san!”

Rose, who noticed her strange behavior first, caught the small body from behind as she was ready to collapse.

Whether something had happened to her body or not, Kato-san’s state was clearly unusual.

The whole body was trembling, the breathing was irregular, and was blinking unnaturally. It seemed that she was somehow trying to get up, but she had already lost all power in her legs.

Presently she looked like a snowflake that would break if moved even a little.

Was it a seizure caused by some disease?No. The timing is wrong for it to be that.

If anything it looked like Kato-san was on the verge of panic.

Fear, panic, depression. There is none of her usual intelligent figure there.

Why is this kind of..... As soon as I thought that I remembered what Kato-san saw just before she was on the verge of collapse.

A large group of people. In particular, men who account for more than half of them.

As for a reason for the abnormality, There is nothing easier to understand.

After Kato-san had come to this world, she had an extremely traumatic experience.

Even if she was frightened at this stage, there is nothing wrong with it, it could even be said to be predictable as the natural thing to do.

Then, why could I not predict this happening?

To begin with, Kato-san herself didn't even expect this.

It's a simple thing. Kato-san has never shown such an attitude to me for anything so far, not even once.

"So r..... rr, y. Sen, pai."

I couldn't recognize this little girl that was so fragile as to be trembling like this.

She wasn't afraid me nor frightened by me either. Because she was okay with me, I thought there wouldn't be a problem with other people either —in fact, I never even doubted whether or not there would be a problem with this.

After seeing her like this, thinking back, her condition up until now was much stranger.

Why was she okay with me.... No. Now is not the time to be thinking about such things.

Cutting off my thoughts I confirmed Kato-san's condition.

The girl was looking more flushed, even her lips began to go purple. She isn't even breathing correctly.

I can't leave it like this.

"Rose."

I gazed at Rose who was embracing Kato-san.

"I'd like you to take Kato-san and leave this place immediately."

I have to calm Kato-san down as soon as possible.

To do that it was necessary to first move her from this place.

It seemed reasonable to entrust Rose with moving Kato, who is currently unable to walk. Since Rose is a friend, Kato san would be able to feel more at ease, so I could leave her to Rose.

"Accepted."

Rose quickly responded.

She held onto the trembling Kato san very carefully as if she were handling a broken object

Rose will take Kato-san as she is. Naturally Kato-san can no longer accompany us, but this is something that is no longer in our control.

“So, so r, rry..... Senpai. I’msorry.”

Kato-san apologizes in delirious words, but blaming her for this is pointless.

“Don’t worry. This level of support isn’t a problem.”

“Senpai.....”

Part 2

After laughing lightly, I turned my eyes towards Rose.

“I’ll leave Kato-san to you.”

“Understood.”

Both Rose holding Kato-san; and Gerbera watching over the two, disappeared back into the forest.

Only Lily, Ayame, who was peeping out of the jersey, and me remained.

Lily tightly pulled the hem of my clothes.

“Master.”

“Aa, it’s alright I understand.”

I took a deep breath and calmed my mind.

Kato-san’s physical condition is worrisome, but we have our own task to do.

The plan has been changed slightly, but the tasks remain the same.

Contact the humans, negotiate guidance to the village, procure goods if possible, and find a place to leave Kato-san.

“Well then, shall we go as well?”

“Yes, master.”

“Kuu.”

We each nodded as we nestled up to each other beginning our walk towards the humans.

* * *

We walked through the forest while making as much noise as possible.

This was to drown out the movements of Rose who had separated from us, and to alert them that we are approaching.

“Please lower your sword! We’re not monsters!”

I make sure to call out to them before we are seen by the opposite side.

It would be unbearable to be attacked due to a misunderstanding — or rather; I find it troubling that it won't be a misunderstanding since we actually are mostly monsters.

It's for that reason that saying something is most useful, as it makes it easy for the other side to make their own assumptions from it. The reason is because most monsters lack any clear will, and thus are unable to understand human speech.

However, that is ultimately mere speculation on my part. There is the possibility that I've overlooked some circumstances, something might just happen under my supervision, or a spell might just suddenly come flying our way.

This nerve-wracking journey makes me feel like my heart and stomach are being gripped by anxiety. The sense of tension feels as though you are one step from the edge of a cliff. If it wasn't for the footsteps of the girl walking next to me, I might have ended up being seized by dizziness.

Fortunately, I had guessed right. We managed to get close without being attacked by the men, who had been lying in wait in a circular formation.

A commotion had spread amongst the students and soldiers after we appeared in the small clearing.

"No way, human...?" Someone muttered.

I seized that chance to speak.

"That's right. We're humans, not enemies. Will you lower your swords?"

At my appeal, I saw hesitation born in the tips of the blades pointed towards us.

Good. With this, the first stage is cleared. For now I was able to gain some room for discussion.

"I'd like to talk with your representative. Who is he? "

Cowering strangely, and holding doubt is foolish. I respectfully and carefully threw out the question. Lily drawing close to me gave me the courage I needed.

A commotion was raised again, and the students' gaze gathered at one point.

"That's me."

Attracting attention as he came out; as I expected, it was the white helmet who was the first to notice our presence.

Sheathing his sword, he walked towards us alone.

He's smaller than I thought. The soldiers who became ghouls were more heavily built than I am; yet he was even shorter than me. His face may not be visible, but his age shouldn't be that different from mine. Perhaps he might even be younger than me.

In consideration of our vigilance, the white helmet stopped walking about two meters away from us.

".....?"

Suddenly, I saw something glittering floating above his shoulder; which caused me to squint my eyes for a clearer look.

It was a yellow, faintly glittering, fluffy orb.

Its size is slightly smaller than a clenched fist? There was a doll made of clay, with limbs and two eyeball-like hollows that glittered.

.....What, is that?

A creature from this world? Perhaps, a monster?Rather, it doesn't seem dangerous, and it just sits there spinning slowly as it floats.

I quickly looked at the other soldiers, but none of them possessed something like this. This doesn't seem to be common for otherworld people.

Seriously, what is it?

I'm really curious about it. Nevertheless, I should first concentrate on the person before me.

Since it is unlikely to be something dangerous, I decided to leave this matter for later and then fixed my gaze on the white helmet.

"Thank you for responding to my call. Moreover, I am sorry for spying on you."

“It’s okay. Considering that we are fully armed, your wariness is justified.”

“Thank you for your understanding. My name is Mashima Takahiro. This person is Mizushima Miho.”

“My name is Silane. I am the vice chief of this chivalric order.”

The white helmet, or rather, Silane gave a simple greeting.

Then, I suddenly realized my misunderstanding.

He’s — she’s a woman. The stern and low voice from before that came from the bottom of the helmet was a little muffled, so I misunderstood. But, as I approached to exchange words, there was a softness peculiar to a lady in the sound of her voice.

She bowed her head. A disturbing action to show her soldiers — no, if they obey her I guess they should be address as knights?

“Travelers coming from another world are a rare sight.”

It has come. The huge exaggeration. Her quaintness, is it due to her characteristics? Or just something that is unique to other world people?

In any case, what’s being said isn’t wrong. I nodded, then asked afterwards,

“Yes, it is as you had said. I can see that it appears you are together with other transported people. Would it be alright for us to assume that you know about our circumstances?”

“Yes. They have been kept safe till now.”

Those words that concealed no intentions, held relief.

As long as she isn’t putting on an act, they don’t seem to have the intention to bring us harm.

On the contrary, there are even indications that they are glad that we are safe.

The proof of this is how Silane continued on with a proposal.

“It must’ve been difficult. We hereby extend an invitation for your brethren to our country. If you don’t mind my asking, won’t you come together with us?”

“That is..... just what I wanted.”

I was slightly perplexed.

Information on the way to human civilization was what we originally intended to request from them. From how things turned out, this development was entirely favorable.

Wait a minute, our position is quite bad.

“Is that okay? You’d be bringing us suspicious people, into your home.”

Taking common sense into consideration, people from another world aren’t residents of a field of flowers.

I do not know how common sense works around here, but even if the phenomenon of otherworld transfer is well known; we are foreigners, outsiders..... In other words, it doesn’t change that they should be wary of suspicious people.

“Of course, it doesn’t matter.”

Therefore, I was suspicious of there being an underlying motive. But Silane’s sincere attitude shows that we transported people are welcome to visit.

Even the mood makes it seem that it’s something natural to do.

“It’s because you visitors from afar, are our guests of honor.”

“Guest of honor.....?”

Hearing those words, somehow, made my spine straighten out.

Apart from that, there didn’t seem to be any malicious intent in her words.

Afterward Silane looked at me with a sincere expression, at the very least she doesn’t seem to be faking it.

Therefore, the feeling came from a discrepancy in the two worlds’ logic.

For example, I think of myself as an intruder in this world; but the other party seems to think of us as honored guests.

There is a difference in each of our perspectives. That is why our thoughts did not match up.

Since the other party is from a different world it is obvious conclusion, such a simple matter..... Although it is easy to say such, not being able to understand each other's thoughts is more dangerous than anything. Even if the current situation is favorable, I can't predict when that will change.

"I'm sorry Silane-san. What do you mean by us being honored guests?"

"That is....."

While answering my question, Silane noticed something and cut off her word mid sentence.

.....Damn. Was I too hasty?

I wanted to click my tongue at my own impatience, but Silane did not seem to notice my discomfort.

"I am really sorry Takahiro-dono. We need to move on before we can talk in depth. If we linger here too long in this 『Sea of Trees』, it might become fatal for us."

Saying this Silane put her heels together and lowered her head.

It was a sincere expression.

"I understand your uneasiness about not understanding anything at all, but won't you please come with us first?. We will be able to reach our destination very soon. I will explain after we arrive."

Silane raised her head. From underneath her white helmet, she gazed at me with eyes full of sincerity.

"..... I understand."

In this kind of situation, I can't press her for answers any longer.

So I accepted her offer.

The Silane who was unaware of my inner thoughts, seemed to let out a laugh from inside her helmet.

"Then come with us. We welcome you."

* * *

Immediately after our self-introductions, we departed.

The armored knights split into two parties to guard the group from both the front and the rear.

In the front was Silane, leading the entire group of knights.

In total 15 students, including Lily and me, were being protected by them.

In the first place, the students seemed to be split into various groups, and interact with each other. The newcomers entered the original groups and moved together. Thanks to that, me sticking together with Lily was not be seen as weird.

“So far you’ve been wandering through this forest? You did good to survive that.”

“It is okay now though.”

“These fellows are guarding us now. We are saved.”

“I thought it would only be temporary, but we really are saved.”

“Well Mashima-san was lucky! I’m glad you’re still alive!”

The tired students spoke warm words of welcome to us, who had just joined them.

Since we decided to depart soon after our introductions, I only know their names and have yet to grasp their personalities. However, there were still a few of them that I remembered from the past.

One of them was a boy that seemed to be older than me. His name seems to be Taichi Miyoshi.

Originally his companions were two boys and two girls, but he called out to others impartially.

In other words is he the class mediator? Actually, he seems to just be a classmate.

I remembered another one of them, but not in a good way.

He was younger than me and his name was Sakagami Gouhuta. I did not know his name from him personally, but was instead informed by a bitter Miyo.

To put it simply Sakagami was a delinquent. While scratching his dirty blond hair, he sharply glanced at us. When his gaze turned towards Lily, he made an indecent smile..... I suppose that is the reason for his gaze. Lily's appearance is currently that of Mizushima Miho, a beautiful girl, something that their current group was lacking.

There is only person accompanying Sakagami. He is a small weak looking student. He is carrying a large backpack that seems to contain both his, and Sakagami's luggage causing him to stagger while walking.

Even here people are oppressing others. With no one stopping such unreasonable behavior.

You could tell several other students, including Miyoshi, were bitter about Sakagami's presence and behavior from the looks in their eyes.

Well, I understand their feelings. I also dislike what I'm seeing.

Looking at them I recalled memories from our prior life at school, that by now feels like a distant past.

The grades are mixed, and we are currently moving through a forest. But this still resembles a classroom that you would find anywhere in Japan.

Nonetheless, the students would never have expected the be transferred here and be put into this type of situation.

"Are Mashima-kun and Mizushima-san tired yet?"

"Yes. Thank you."

"Isn't Miyo-san a bit tired yet?"

"Haha. A girl is worrying about me. I do long distance track and field events. I won't tire out that easily."

Occasionally someone will let out words of encouragement as the 30 knights and students traverse the otherwise silent animal trail.

One of the reasons for this, is the large amount of fatigue that everyone is experiencing.

The other reason, is because it is unwise to engage in idle chats while walking

through the forest. Even a child understands that excess noise makes it more difficult to detect approaching monsters.

“.....”

As a part of the group of students, I continued on, walking silently. While doing so, I felt a sense of unease.

“Something is dangerous.” Is not what I felt.

It seems to be the same thing that I had felt during the exchange with Silane a while ago.

It somehow felt like I was a foreign object here.

Needless to say, I am in fact, a foreign body in this group.

What proved that I was a foreigner here is that from the time I joined in with the group, I have yet to separate from Lily. Although I don't know how it looks from their perspective..... I can feel the somewhat jealous looks in their eyes. Actually there was a sense of distance and wariness in regards to me, even from the guards.

So it is certain I'm a foreigner here..... Yet this is not the cause of the feelings of unease.

The feeling's origin is from something else.

But I have yet to figure out what that is.

“Mashima-kun.”

Lily clutches my hand as I was lost in thought.

Her eyes filled with with concern, intently stared at me.

At the same time gazes filled with jealousy were directed towards me; well that doesn't matter.

“Are you alright Mashima-kun?”

This time, Lily isn't calling me master. She is acting as Mizushima Miho until the end.

But that doesn't change our relationship.

“It’s alright.”

At least she is standing here with me.

Because of that, I’ll endure along with the other transferees until this sense of unease comes to fruition. In other words, I swallowed my emotions and continued moving forward.

Soon we began to climb a rising slope. Immediately after climbing the hillside, the field of view before us widened.

A shout of joy broke out amongst the group.

The forest that had constantly obscured our view is gone.

Instead there was the appearance of a large building, consisting of tens of thousands of bricks.

There was a huge fortress where the deep forest once was, its walls now colored brown from the passage of time.

Chapter 15: A catastrophe

The fortress, enshrined in the deep forest, was shaped like a tessellation of irregular, spiky polyhedra. To describe it in one word, it was forbidding. The passing of years had weathered its red surface and this had merely added to its imposing presence. From where I stood, only the outer walls were visible and that alone was sufficient to make one understand just how massive this fortress was. I had thought that we would have been brought to a village or town, but if you think about it, there was no way a normal town or village could have been established in a place that the otherworlders referred to as the 'Sea of Trees'. It would not be enough to merely arm yourself with cold, hard metal. People could not survive in such a place, unless they hid themselves within robust structures made of thousands of bricks.

"People from another world. That is our destination, Fort Tilia." Silane's once strained tone was now coloured with relief.

"Our knights regularly hunt down the monsters in the vicinity of the fort, so you are safe now. Preparations for your arrival are well underway at the fort, and the others should be waiting for us there, so let's go. It's right up ahead."

The students began their advance once more at a light pace. Before they knew it, the forest floor beneath their feet had given way to a well-trodden path, one sufficient enough to be called a road.

"Are there any others like us in the fort?"

Taking advantage of the excited atmosphere generated by the other students, I asked Silane another question.

"Yes. One other lucky person managed to make it through the forest alone, like you." Silane's voice trailed off as she responded.

"Unfortunately, this person was the only one, other than you two, who had passed through the forest using their own strength."

"The only person other than Li... Mizushima-san and me?"

"That is correct."

"But, there are many other students here just like me."

I looked at the other students, who were walking in high spirits. If Silane wasn't lying, then what about the others?

"Unlike you, they didn't pass through this forest using their own abilities." Silane responded with consistent sincerity.

"The third order of our knights have several forward bases within the forest for the purpose of gathering information. Your compatriots were found hiding there, so we travelled to each of the four bases and gathered all of your fellow otherworlders together bringing them to the fort."

"...I see."

I nodded with understanding.

I thought it was strange from the very beginning. At the time when the Colony collapsed, there were approximately 800 students. Among them, how many had survived and left the Colony? 100? 200? Or could the number of survivors be twice of that amount? In any case, for those who escaped from the Colony, the monster infested forest must have been a living hell for them. This was something I could say based on my own experiences, so there was no doubt about it. Actually, if I had not met Lily, I would have already been dead. With exception to an irregular like me, it wouldn't be strange even if they were annihilated. When I first came across the students that were guarded by the knights, I was shocked to see that so many people had survived, since, frankly speaking, their survival should have been impossible.

"However, I don't know what they had been through." Silane said in a serious tone.

"The knights use those bases as a place to rest as they explore the depths of the Sea of Trees. Although, the appearance of those bases look like simple cabins."

"..."

"Since we had set up barrier stones that were painstakingly created via alchemy, the bases were protected from monsters. Thanks to that, all the otherworlders here were able to survive. I am sure you can understand how

useful they are.”

I became silent unknowingly as I had recalled the time when I spent the night at the cabin. Apparently, it belonged to the knights. This ‘barrier stone’ must have been the strange stone that prevented Lily and Rose from drawing close. Although, for the sake of letting Lily and the rest inside, I had already destroyed all the ones there.

Recalling this, a worrying thought crossed my mind.

“I don’t suppose you use the same barrier stones in the fort up ahead, do you?”

If that were the case, Lily wouldn’t be able to approach the fort. A wave of panic washed over me the instant that thought crossed my mind, but fortunately, it was an unneeded concern.

“No, we don’t. The barrier stones have a limited range of effect. When it comes to the size of the fort, the range is simply inadequate.”

“Ah, is that so?”

“Not only are they rare, but we no longer have the knowledge to make more. On top of that, their effective range is limited. So, in the end, they can only keep monsters at bay. It’s not something that can completely prevent intrusions. In the first place, the criteria needed to set it up is too hard for it to be used here.”

I heaved a sigh of relief and gave her an appropriate response. That was wonderful news. It didn’t seem that the barrier stones would be a problem for us in the immediate future. After regaining my composure, I looked at the students who were walking around cheerfully.

“I don’t know what they had been through. That’s true, isn’t it?” I repeated Silane’s words from a while ago, and sighed.

“They were lucky, weren’t they?”

“What do you mean, Takahiro-dono?”

“No, I mean, according to your story, they arrived at the cabins where the boundary stones were set up by chance. By coincidence, you happened to visit and were able to help them as well. Isn’t that right? Is that not an amazing

stroke of luck?”

In some regards, their circumstances resembled my own. After the collapse of the Colony, I wandered the forest, with both mind and body in tatters, and eventually reached that cave. Just as I was about to give up on life, Lily found me, and because of that, I’m still here now. It was probable that I had felt slight sympathy for the other students walking with us.

“No, that’s not quite right.” Silane refuted my conjecture.

“We had received information that there might still be survivors, and we were requested to protect them. So, it wasn’t a coincidence that we saved them.”

“Requested? The hell...?”

I was baffled by what Silane just said.

This is no longer the Japan on Earth we were familiar with. Even in coincidental encounters, it was impossible for anyone to help someone without having hidden motives. Such naïve things cannot be expected. For starters, who could have requested for it?

While I was lost in doubt, a joyful cheer reached my ears.

Looking towards the front, I noticed a small iron gate that didn’t begin to compare with the magnificence of the fortress. It seemed that we had reached our destination while we were talking. The area around the fortress, though hidden deep in the forest, had been cleared by humans. The trees, which we had grown accustomed to seeing, disappeared from our sight as we entered the clearing. The sky was vast. It was as if we were suddenly released from something that had enshrouded us. This was a place for humans. The feeling was tangible. Unfortunately, I shouldn’t lose my focus because of that.

Just a little distance away, in front of the fortress, dozens of knights stood with their heels aligned. There were also several men and women around the fortress dressed in the clothes of students.

I was confused, shouldn’t there be only one student who had made it to the fortress? Turning to ask Silane, who had been walking beside me, I found she had stopped dead in her tracks.

“Silane-san?”

“...Don't tell me.”

When I turned around, I noticed that Silane was looking up as she groaned. Seeing her reaction naturally caused me to also look up as well, and my gaze landed upon the yellow flickering light. The mysterious creature that usually floated above Silane's shoulder was thrashing and flailing its short limbs about as it flew around in circles. It seemed to want to convey a certain message using its gestures, but unfortunately, I couldn't decipher what it was trying to say. However, it was a different story for Silane; she seemed to be fluent in the creature's language of movement.

“All members, draw your swords!”

Silane's sounds of warning rang through the forest. Before I could even raise my question, the situation had begun to unfold. In the next moment, a huge green caterpillar made its appearance, pushing through the forest trees from which we had just emerged.

“Uwaaaaaa!?”

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

It was a gigantic monster with a body over 3 meters in length. What was even worse was that there were five of them. The quintet of monsters charged at us, making unnerving chattering sounds. The students could be heard screaming while the knights rushed to unsheathe their swords.

“W-Why there are so many green caterpillars in the vicinity of the fortress!?” One of the knights, who seemed shaken up, screamed.

Come to think of it, Silane did say that the knights eradicate the monsters in the vicinity of the fortress on a regular basis. So, it was possible that they had not encountered that many monsters before.

As those thoughts swirled through my mind, I pulled out the wooden sword that I had concealed. At this point, it was already a conditioned reflex. After judging that I had no time to equip the shield that was worn on my back, I instantly exchanged glances with Lily who was next to me. What was most important was to confirm the situation of my surrounding. However, when I

looked around, I was stunned by the scene that had unfolded before me.

“...Huh?”

All the students around me had fallen into a state of panic. Those who tried to flee to the fortress before them became oblivious to their surroundings due to their panic, and ended up crashing into one another, which, in turn, caused them to tumble to the ground from the impact. The fallen were actually among the luckier of the students. There were others who were shoving anyone who got in their way as they tried to make their way to safety, some who were completely paralysed with fear, some who started clinging to the knights, and even huge idiots who wound up kicking anyone nearby to the ground.

...What on Earth is this?

Looking at this scene just made me wonder how all these people managed to survive up till now. According to Silane's story, it was certainly true that they didn't leave the forest on their own. They hid themselves in a cabin, and remained there until Silane and the group the knights came to their rescue. However, before they had taken shelter at the safe place, they should've been through hell in the forest after the Colony collapsed. And yet, why...

At this rate, it would be hard for us to escape without proper planning, and those students would also be a hindrance to the knights' fight. Panic is a contagious thing. Upon seeing how the people around were reacting, the knights became visibly agitated as well. This commotion wasn't merely holding everyone back. It was clearly a suicidal action.

“Don't panic!”

Silane, the sole person among them who remained composed, rebuked her subordinates. However, one could partly detect a bitter tone in her voice, probably because she understood how bad the situation was at that moment.

“Strengthen your defence! They are coming!”

The creaking sounds, caused by their jaws moving, could be heard as the green caterpillars launched themselves at us. Even though they resembled large caterpillars, the way they charged at us was more like large bulls. The knights, who had regained their composure after being rebuked by Silane, tried to form

a defensive wall holding their shields in front of the students. Nevertheless, try as they might, they still couldn't give me a sense of security. Perhaps I was unconsciously comparing them with Rose.

Could they defend against those monsters?

Anxiety built up inside my chest as I watched the green caterpillars crashing into the knights. No, they almost crashed into the knights, but it didn't quite happen that way. An unexpected development took effect before that scene could even start to unfold.

A cool-sounding voice reached my ears. "Leave it to me," and everything came to an abrupt and violent end.

The bodies of the green caterpillars had been torn to shreds. Blue liquid was splattered all over the place as their bodies were blown apart in the opposite directions. All I could feel was numbed shock as the whole scene took place right before my eyes. The fight ended in an instant, leaving only carnage in its place. I couldn't comprehend what was going on at all. The only thing I knew was who had done it.

A girl, clad in sailor uniform landed on the ground with a thud. There was no trace of this person at all just now. It was as though she had appeared out of nowhere. As she was stood in front of the knights as if she was protecting them, she had to be the one who had to be responsible for the unbelievable scene before me just now.

"It's fine now."

The girl with lustrous long black hair that extended to her waist smiled pleasantly. It was a warm smile that lifted up everyone's uneasiness.

The sudden appearance of the girl made everyone who was present hold their breath. I was no exception. Rather, I was possibly the most shocked of all.

The girl was holding a slender sword with an exquisite design. I assumed it was what had torn the five caterpillars that had attacked us into shreds. However, to the very end, that remained merely a conjecture. Even though I had been present, I couldn't understand how she had triumphed over the green

caterpillars. It was unbelievable. I had acquired the skill to enhance my physical ability using magic, and since sensory organs were also strengthened, it would not be a difficult feat to grasp the movement of any opponent that was at similar level to a Fire Fang. Although, seeing a movement and being able to react to it are separate issues as humans' senses are usually much better than their physical functions. If Gerbera were my opponent, I wouldn't be able to react in time, but I could still see her movements. But, it was no exaggeration to say that I couldn't see the movement of the girl in front of me at all. The instant I spotted a dark silhouette moving, everything was already over. She was unbelievably swift, even more-so than Gerbera. It was impossible. It was incomprehensible. The only possible explanation was that we existed in different time axes. Although, from her incredible strength alone, I could figure out who she was.

“...She's a cheat holder.”

The moment those words escaped my lips, she smiled, and her expression soften considerably. It was such an attractive smile that even someone like me, who was already accustomed to Lily's smile, was almost charmed by it.

“Hey, Eno. Isn't it heartless of you to only make yourself look cool there?”

A voice of complaint directed at her, prompted me to turn to look for its source. An armed party, consisting of two guys in school uniforms, could be seen coming from the direction of the fortress. The first guy held two straight swords, one in each hand, while the other was wielding an eye-catching battle staff, inlaid with gaudy-looking jewels.

“There was no avoiding it since this was an emergency. You guys are too slow and I can move faster.” The girl returned her slender sword to its sheath as she replied to them with a faint smile.

“Aren't you saying we're like turtles compared to you?”

While the two of them engaged in conversation easily, all eyes were on them given their abrupt appearance. It was inevitable since the scene we had witnessed earlier had left a tremendous impact on us. Part way through their conversation though, they suddenly became aware of the stun looks on our faces.

“More importantly, Juumonji-kun, let’s introduce ourselves first. Everyone seems to be dumbfounded.”

“Ah. Now that you mention it, you are right.”

Upon hearing what the girl said, the guy who wielded two straight swords nodded and looked at us. One could really tell that he carried the aura of a sportsman from his tall stature and his strong, sturdy body.

“Nice to meet you. My name is Juumonji Tatsuya. And, these guys here are Eno Yuna and Watanabe Yoshiki. All of us belong to the ‘Scouting Corps’.”

When he signalled them with his eyes, Eno Yuna, the girl who had defeated the caterpillars easily, looked slightly bashful as she shrugged her shoulders and waved her hand lightly. In that same moment, the other guy, Watanabe, small in stature, raised his battle staff as a response.

“It seems that everyone managed to escape the forest safely. I’m glad. And I’d like to convey my thanks to all the knights for accepting our request. Thanks to you all, we still have our schoolmates with us.”

...So that’s how it was.

I had finally grasped the situation. The name, Eno Yuna, had sounded familiar to me. There were many different kinds of cheat holders from Warrior types who excelled in magic and physical skills to those with other unique abilities but without fighting capability like me. However, there was an exception. A group, that numbered less than ten, unexpectedly possessed both cheat abilities, and Eno Yuna was one of them.

—— Eno Yuna the ‘Skanda’. (TL: Skanda = The swift-footed guardian deity. You can google it)

She was widely known even among the ‘Stay Behind Group’ for her speed. That girl was amazingly fast. From my understanding, there was no one who could match her speed even among those who possessed cheat abilities in the Scouting Corps. After confirming it with my own eyes, it was undoubtedly true that her speed was overwhelming. Due to her popularity, the news that she had joined the first Scouting Corps that comprised mainly elite members had reached even my ears even though I was from the Stay Behind Group.

The first Scouting Corps.

The team that consisted of those with cheat abilities left the colony to head to the eastern land in order to acquire the information about this world. As a result, the strength of the remaining Scouting Corps stationed in the colony was weakened, causing the collapse of the colony. However, that first Scouting Corps that had left on that mission seemed to have made contact with the residents of this world as originally intended.

Silane had mentioned that it wasn't a coincidence that she ended up sheltering these students and that she had received a request to protect them because there was a possibility that there might be survivors. In other words, the one who had made the request was the first Scouting Corps before us, and they had also saved the lives of all the students here. Even in the earlier incident, they removed the threat to the students by eliminating the attacking monsters. There were no qualms about it. All these events happened only because those who possessed the power were using their abilities for good.

"I'm delighted to be able to meet everyone here. There's nothing to be worried about from now on. As long as we're here, you'll be fine."

The line Juumonji just said showed his conviction as someone who would protect those close to him. Even though their behaviour was different from each other, these three members from the Scouting Corps were brimming with a certain confidence. They had faith in their own strength, purpose, and existence. It was as though they were heroes who lived in the story.

That was laughable. There was no way that was possible. There was no way they were heroes. They were just students. They were simply young teens just like us.

"You can just leave everything to us. Be reassured and just take a rest."

Saying all those things wouldn't give me reassurance at all. In the first place, the tragic event that had led to the collapsing of the Colony was because the Colony had entrusted everything to the first Scouting Corps. I would not forget that hell. I had never forgotten about it. The culprits of that event were these three people in front of me, who also possessed cheat abilities. There was no way they could possibly be saints. They were a group of filthy, immature young

people who were possibly driven by greed.

And yet, what was going on here?

There was no particular need to look around since the atmosphere here had confirmed that everyone was worshipping these three as heroes. They had lowered their guard and became relaxed since the misfortune was over and these three members would supposedly eliminate the dangers from them forever. It didn't seem as if the students or knights doubted what these people from the Scouting Corps had said. Everyone seemed to believe in them except for one person.

There was definitely something off. Something was not right. There were inconsistencies and discrepancies in these events. Or could there be something wrong with me?

"Majima-kun." Lily called my name anxiously.

At that moment, the warmth that emanated from her as she stood close to me was the only thing that confirmed my sanity.

We were then led to the fortress as students under their protection. The three people from the Scouting Corps had something to discuss with Silane, so they parted from us. After separating from the knights, only the students were escorted to their rooms. The one who had guided us through a passage with reddish bricks was a man clad in different equipment than the knights. It was an armour that merely functioned to protect the body with a round shield similar to mine. I had only caught a glimpse of it as we made our way to our destination, but he seemed to be carrying a spear that resembled those carried by sentries which possibly suggested that he was from a different unit.

Even though we were told that all of us could have our own rooms, I decided to stay in the same room as Lily. Taking our safety into consideration, this was an obvious choice for us. However, possibly because the other students were feeling anxious as well after arriving at a totally unknown place, there were some who requested to share the rooms with a few other people, too, so it was fortunate that we didn't stand out because of that.

The room that we were escorted to was simply furnished with just two beds and a desk. There was also a single wooden framed window, but what surprised me was the lighting device that was installed on the wall. Upon closer examination, I realized that it was neither a type of electric light nor a torch, but some kind of tool with a fist-sized gem fitted inside. The gem itself seemed to be emitting light, though I wasn't sure what theory was behind it. Was it a magical device? It seemed that this world had developed a level of technology that was very different from our world.

By the time I had finished inspecting the room, the man, who had guided us earlier returned once again with a tub of water, cloth, and clothes. Probably because he knew that we came from a different world, he looked nervous. After telling us that they would be holding a banquet to welcome all the people today, and that there would be someone who would come to inform us once everything was prepared, the man left.

Once I finished wiping my body with the wet cloth and washed my jersey, I changed into the clothing provided. This new set of clothing consisted of an indigo coloured long sleeve shirt and a pair of trousers. It seemed that these outfits were sewn for the more muscular men in this fortress, so they were quite large. As Lily was rather slender, she appeared to be wearing a tunic. To be honest, they weren't really comfortable either. That might have been the reason why those from the Scouting Corps were still wearing their school uniforms even after arriving here. I truly missed my clothes that were made by Gerbera, but there was no use complaining about it. After changing into my new clothing, I also noticed that my skin felt irritated by the texture of the cloth. I rolled up my sleeves and wrapped the sash that was provided around my waist. Since they had left me with my weapons, I wore them over my clothing.

After giving my look the final touch, I sat down on one of the two beds and heaved a sigh. Everything had proceeded so smoothly up until now that it was scary. It made me feel foolish for overthinking it and making so many preparations. However, I knew that the reason I wasn't able to bring myself to feel happy was because I felt that there was something not quite right about the situation.

“Are you tired, Master?”

Lily, who had been carefully inspecting the room, stood in front of me and peered into my face.

“...Don’t call me Master here. We do not know who might be listening.”

“As long as I keep my voice low, it should be fine as this room seems to be soundproof, too. This is exactly the place where we can let Ayame roam around freely, isn’t it?”

“That is certainly true.”

Upon hearing my reply, Lily lowered the zipper of her jersey, revealing her chest. It slowly transformed into a semi-liquid state, revealing a large hollow where Ayame was curled up inside. Slowly, Ayame raised her head. If this room were monitored by someone, all our secrets would have been revealed at once, though I was probably overthinking it. However, for someone like me who had no knowledge of magic, it was impossible to tell if someone were using enchantments to monitor this room. The moment that thought crossed my mind, I began to have doubts again. I wondered if it was safe to hide Ayame under Lily’s jersey.

“...I understand, Lily. Let’s be like usual when we’re alone.”

“Un.”

Ayame, who had been waiting for our conversation to conclude, hopped onto the floor and came over to me as I laid on the bed. It seemed that she was trying to attract my attention as she wagged her fluffy tail that was as big as her body. When I stretched my hand out and scratched under her chin, she squeezed her eyes shut, appearing contented. When I withdrew my hand mischievously, she began scratching at my hands with her forefeet. It didn’t hurt, though, since her claws weren’t really sharp. As she urged, I began stroking her again in the direction of the fur, or occasionally the opposite one. Ayame’s coat was soft. She bathed regularly, and the softness of her coat was probably due to Gerbera’s frequent grooming of her fur using the comb Rose made. The moment I stopped stroking her, she would start scratching against my hand, and if I still hadn’t heeded to her urging, she would pull my hand towards her forcefully. It was such a desperate gesture that it felt soothing just

watching it. Since she was grunting unhappily through her nose, I decided to stop teasing her. In the meantime, I also removed the bandage from my left hand, revealing Asarina, who began to grow and coil around Ayame.

“Master.”

While I was watching the two young ones playing with each other, Lily, who had finished changing her clothes, clung to my arm. A mischievous smile was etched across her face as she touched my cheek in way that resembled a little bird pecking at its food. It was as if a fox was pawing at me playfully in order to attract my attention. I perceived what she wanted, so I decided to speak my mind.

“Could you lend me your ear for a minute?”

“Of course.”

I decided to tell Lily all the feelings that I had been experiencing ever since I joined this group of humans. Lily, on the other hand, was earnestly listening to me from the beginning till the end. As I poured out my thoughts, I was able to organize the situation, too. Once I put my thoughts together, I told her that I was feeling discomfort because, “In short, I think everyone here is too trusting.”

From Silane’s point of view, anyone who came from another world, like us, was supposed to be suspicious strangers, so there was no reason at all for her to believe in us. In the first place, even though they had risked their lives going through such a dangerous forest to rescue the students at the request of the Scouting Corps, they actually had no obligation to heed that request at all. The same could also be said for those students. They should have known what happened at the Colony, and yet they had still accepted those three people so easily. It was as if all of them didn’t know how to mistrust someone at all, and accepted us easily.

“It is certainly strange.”

After listening to my story, Lily agreed with my opinion as well.

“As Master said, something definitely doesn’t feel right. I think there are probably some circumstances that we are not aware of.”

“If that’s the case, we’ll have to ask Silane-san about it.”

“Yeah, that’s right. But...”

Lily nodded her head in agreement, but it seemed that there was something that she was hesitating to say.

“Is that a bad thing for us in any way?”

“Eh?”

Lily’s question made me realize something that I hadn’t thought of before.

“As Master said, they are too trusting, but is that not something that is convenient for us? In fact, everything is going well so far, isn’t it?”

“That’s...”

“Since we don’t know if they have any ulterior motive, it is necessary for us to investigate this situation, just in case. But that’s not what Master is worried about, is it?”

I was at a loss for words when I looked at Lily, who was looking at me as she tilted her head. What Lily said was right on the mark. Honestly, since everything was proceeding smoothly, I should be happy. Doubting what was happening behind the scenes was a different problem. Despite both these revelations, I was still not pleased.

“In my opinion, it seemed to me that Master was shocked by the fact that something was off...” Lily said as she looked at me.

At that moment, the sound of knocking echoed through the room.

Chapter 16: The Story of Takahiro Majima

Part 1

As I raised my head and collected my thoughts, Lily quickly stood up.

“I’m coming!” (Lily)

Ayame jumped and hid under Lily’s clothes in her belly. I rolled up the bandage on my left hand to conceal Asarina.

After making sure everything was in order, Lily opened the lock and peeped through gap of the door.

“Yes, you are?” (Lily)

While making sure the visitor couldn’t see me, Lily responded cautiously. However, as a result I too, couldn’t see who the visitor was. Just as I expected, seems like the man had come here as the preparations to welcome us were finished.

“Wh-, wha?” (???)

I heard a disarrayed voice. It seems the visitor was a male, to be precise the voice was young like a boy’s. Possibly one of the students.... no.... this was...

“I heard that Takahiro’s room was here, but why is Mizushima-san here?” (??? ->Boy)

“That ... is, Oh? If am I’m not mistaken, you are ...?” (Lily)

Feeling something was off, I stood up. The voice was very familiar. I rushed to the door and threw it wide open, surprising Lily in the process. The visiting student turned and faced me.

A bit shorter than me yet built solidly, the boy wore our school uniform. His unkempt uncouth hair was ruffled. His eyes met with mine through his glasses.

He was an acquaintance.

If I had to say more, he was a classmate and a friend.

“Oh, Takahiro. It’s been a while.” (Boy->Mikihiko)

Laughing with a smile plastered on his face, the boy raised his hand. It appeared that I hadn’t mistaken him for someone else.

“Everything else aside, all that matters is that Takahiro is safe. I had thought that I would never be able to meet my acquaintances again Tahaha~. The clearing difficulty of this world is too damn high. Or is there a mistake in the difficulty setting just for us? I feel like life in this castle is in hard mode.”
(Mikihiko)

“Is this a game?” (Majima)

Although I retorted, I did feel his proposal 『seemed』 to be true. Because, I had no clue about cheats, fantasy, or teleportation/transmigration into a parallel world, but my friend, Shumoku Mikihiko, being an otaku was well informed about it. He would talk enthusiastically about stuff like this after coming to this parallel world.

He was left behind with the Stay Behind Group in the colony as he didn’t have a cheat ability. I had assumed he died on the day the colony collapsed however...

“Nah... but, it’s been a while, really.” (Mikihiko)

“.....yeah. It really has been a while.” (Majima)

His optimistic tone indeed did match my memories of him so I’m sure that he’s definitely not an impersonator or a ghost. As I grew nostalgic, Mikihiko spoke

“Everything said, Takihiro. I’d like to ask you one thing. Why is Mizushima-san here?” (Mikihiko)

“.....for what reason?” (Majima)

“Isn’t this place Takahiro’s room? I came here assuming that was the case.”
(Mikihiko)

I felt it was rude to put it so bluntly however, it was a good question nonetheless, and Mikihiko’s expression was serious. As we silently stared at each other, I sighed deeply. Then with exaggerated gestures I looked at the sky

and dropped my shoulders.

“Perhaps, it’s that sort of thing? It’s like that, isn’t it? If it is as I think then I am somewhat shocked.” (Mikihiko)

“Ahaha. You’re still the same, Shumuko-kun.” (Lily)

Lily seemed to check out what kind of personality the person in front of her had from Miho Mizushima’s memory, and bitterly smiled as she spoke.

“Oh, Mizushima-san, do you know about me? You never talked to me, did you?” (Mikihiko)

“It wouldn’t be difficult to know about you if you’re making noise all the time.” (Lily)

“Aitatata! That serious expression doesn’t suit your face, Mizushima-san.” (Mikihiko)

Mikihiko hit his head as he joked around. I unconsciously revealed a wry smile.

“You really haven’t changed.....” (Majima)

He really didn’t change. For a moment I almost forgot that we were in a different world in a fortress in the middle of a dangerous forest with risk of being attacked by monsters.[A](#)

I felt glad that I was able to talk with a friend I thought I would never meet again. Moreover, that cheerful side of him had not changed.

“Yeah? I hope that’s true. That part of Takahiro has changed a little bit.” (Mikihiko)

“Is that so. I didn’t properly realize it myself.” (Majima)

“I don’t know how to put it, fearless? You’ve become manly? A feeling like that or something.” (Mikihiko)

Mikihiko laughed as I touched my face with my hand.

“Mizushima-san has become a more beautiful woman than before. Both of you have become mature.....hey, what kind of profound relationship is attached

to you two!” (Mikihiko)

“.....What are you saying?” (Majima)

Although, it was true that Lily and I are in that sort of relationship, so what Mikihiko wasn't wrong. Only if you exclude the part of Lily being mistaken for Miho Mizushima, however.

“Don't say absurd things, well, come inside.” (Majima)

I gave him the long awaited 'come in'. It was difficult to stand around whilst talking so I invited Mikihiko into my room. To that, Mikihiko waved his hand.

“Ah, no. I came here to call Takahiro. The preparations to welcome us were finished. I heard that you were here so that's why I came” (Mikihiko)¹

“Ah. So, it was like that.” (Majima)

“Follow me, I'll guide you.” (Mikihiko)

There was no reason to refuse. I obediently followed Mikihiko as he guided me. We left the room and advanced through the brick passageway. Mikihiko lead us while half-stepping, and Lily and I followed his figure.

While walking I noticed on Mikihiko's waist, there were two daggers each on his left and right sides with the same design as the one knights use. The scabbards made a clink clink sound as they hit each other. On my friend's unchanged outfit, that was the only difference from before.

“Walking with your shoulders together and walking close in general are things that a pair of lovers do, damn it. Are you two that close? Tch, I had a feeling when there weren't any traces of one of the beds being used when I glanced at them a while ago, so this is why.” (Mikihiko)

“Don't keep an eye on the minute details, you.....” (Majima)

I let out a sigh while being amazed and refocused my mind, throwing a remark at Mikihiko as I walked between him and Lily.

“You were amongst the survivors that came out from the forest before us, weren't you Mikihiko?” (Majima)

“Ah, you realized it.” (Mikihiko)

“Well, it was just hunch.” (Majima)

Mikihiko wasn't amongst the students that had been protected by Silane and the other knights, but on the other hand, he wasn't a member of the 'Scouting Corps' either. From that, the possibilities were narrowed down.

Nonetheless, the possibility itself was hard to believe in suddenly.

“You properly survived.” (Majima)

Although unintended but my tone was that of admiration and respect.

Surviving the chaos of the colony, walking through and leaving the forest with rampaging monsters wasn't something you could do half-heartedly. Certainly, he was lucky too but even if he only continued to walk through the forest without giving up, that will-power alone deserved praise.

He wasn't a man who was only screwing around.

“Well, I was close to dying a countless number of times. But it was the same for you, wasn't it?” (Mikihiko)²

“.....I guess so.” (Majima)

“Besides, I wasn't alone up till now.” (Mikihiko)

My reply was delayed and somewhat strained, but luckily, it seems Mikihiko didn't notice it.

“It was like that; I was running away from the colony while in a state of confusion. When I thought I would seriously die in vain soon, I was picked up by leader-san of the alliance of knights.” (Mikihiko)

“We are somewhat similar. It was the vice chief for us.” (Majima)

“Ah, Silane-san. She said she wanted to talk us later. She promised to explain in depth after she got back to the fortress for Takahiro. ” (Mikihiko)

“Now that you mention it, she did say something like that.” (Majima)

I felt such things should be left to her subordinates, but she did give a dutiful impression that matched her actions.

“I heard that she wants to discuss something right now.” (Majima)

“Yup. This time, she should be talking about the rescue operation of the surviving students.” (Mikihiko)

He nodded with a nod, and Mikihiko opened his mouth.³

This time Silane-san group only visited a limited number of locations. Protecting a lot of students in the woodlands for extended period was dangerous wasn't it. That's why Silane-san was now discussing with second group how to continue. I think since the scouting corps has returned, the imperial knights will take their place” (Mikihiko)

“Wai-, wait a minute, Mikihiko.” (Majima)

I stopped Mikihiko from talking so I could gather my thoughts. This part of him had not changed.....or rather, it seems like he didn't fix it.

“I'm sorry, but I wasn't able to follow the pace of the conversation. Could you explain from start to finish?” (Majima)

“Is that so? You and others haven't heard the entire story yet. Alright, I'll summarize it, but don't be so concerned.” (Mikihiko)

It seems that Mikihiko who arrived at this fort Slightly earlier than us, was apparently well informed of the situation. This was a chance. I listened to Mikihiko's story.

Part 2

According to Mikihiko's story, the first 'Scouting Corps' were in another fort towards the east——they reached Fortress Ebenus, and it appeared that it had been about 10 days since then.

And around that time, the 'Scouting Corps' were brought a report about the colony's collapse.

Mikihiko didn't know about the detailed circumstances that surrounded this, but there were talks that Miho Mizushima's childhood friend, Takaya Jun, went towards the east to request help from the 'Scouting Corps'.⁴ There was either

another person going east, or perhaps it was the case that Takaya Jun had rushed in with the news of the emergency.

After that, in almost no time, a message was brought here to Fort Tilia.

There was a considerable distance between the two forts, but the way to get in contact between distant places had been prepared for cases like this. It seemed to be a method that utilized magic, but Mikihiko didn't know the details behind it.

Soon after contact had been brought to Fort Tilia like that, it became a major issue where dozens of members led by Silane from the Third Order of the Alliance of Knights left the fortress for rescuing the students.

But at the same time, the 'Scouting Corps' picked out a few people who specialized in speed and dispatched them, and they arrived at the fortress two days ago. The reason was because Silane didn't know about the arrival of the 'Scouting Corps' team until they reached the fortress.

"That is the whole story up until here. Nevertheless, the plans for after this are, the second group will depart while waiting for the Alliance of Knights and Silane-san to come back, and those guys from the 'Scouting Corps' themselves intend to participate with the rescue. The second group is the Imperial Knights. Well, that's just my prediction." (Mikihiko)

As of now, the Southern Empire's army was in Fort Tilia, the 2nd order of Imperial Knights, and then, the three stationed organizations were called the 3rd order of the Alliance of Knights.

It was evident there was a mixture of different military organizations, but it appeared there were several different reasons for that.

"Takahiro, didn't you wonder why there is a fortress in such a forest? Fortresses are for preparing for foreign enemies. However, it's unlikely for human settlements to be inside the forest beyond this place." (Mikihiko)

"That is, in other words....." (Majima)

"Yeah. Mankind lives beyond the forest, and Fort Tilia was constructed with the purpose of protecting people from the threat of the monsters living in the

Sea of Trees. In other words, this fortress spearheads the fight against mankind's common enemies.^B Nevertheless, the empire and the alliance are in a relationship of dependency and suzerain state, so to speak. If I was to accurately express the circumstances of this fortress, I wonder if it would be the form of『the military facilities of the empire are within an allied territory that faces the Sea of Trees, and allied troops are being dispatched』.” (Mikihiko)

“.....It's a complex story.” (Majima)⁵

In any case, whatever the circumstances over there were, if it's to the extent of the whole country having to oppose, it's a fact that monsters were a large threat in this world.

In relation to the story that said the Order of Knights responded to the appeal for aid from the 'Scouting Corps', there was some understanding as for having heard such circumstances. In short, the reason was the question of gains.

I didn't know to what degree the combat abilities were of the knights and soldiers in this world. However, thinking back to the situation where the knights were confronting the green caterpillars, the people possessing combat abilities will be separated from other cheat ability users, there's no questioning that.

We were dragged into a random teleportation into another world, guaranteed to be irregular existences. We didn't have any connections in this world, therefore, it was only natural there wasn't an organization to help us.

However, cheat ability users possessed the strength to lightly kick and disperse monsters here in the Sea of Trees and were extraordinarily useful and capable people in this world. The residents of another world knew their strength and the value of using them, and even if convenience was in mind, it wouldn't be odd.

“And.....we have arrived.” (Mikihiko)

Mikihiko muttered so. He was still in the middle of talking, but it appeared we had arrived at our destination. We were brought to a room that was similar in size to a classroom. There were signs of a commotion in some people.

“Sorry Mikihiko, it turned into a consultation.” (Majima)

There were things I wanted to hear still, but there should be another chance

for that. It was a short period time, but I managed to obtain useful information.

We stopped talking and walked into the room.

Practically every student had gathered in the room, including the 'Scouting Corps'. As we had come here while we talked, it seemed that we had arrived a little late.

You could say it was a warm reception, but it appeared to be a party in a buffet style. Various cuisines were lined up on a long table.

From what I saw, it appeared that the world's eating habits didn't differ much from ours. There was bread, there was soup, and splendid meat dishes were lined up. There wasn't the custom of fish dishes. There was slightly less fruit and leafy vegetables, but there appeared to be a lot of root crops in exchange.

Seeing the decent cooking after a long time, the students appeared to be waiting impatiently. Even so, I didn't change around this. My throat resounded, and Lily, who was next to me, laughed with a giggle.

In addition to the students, there were several elderly men in the room. There weren't tables prepared for us, but it seemed like the interior of the room was arranged for some reason.

Although they weren't wearing helmets or armor on their bodies, there was a weird uniqueness in their demeanor. They were most likely remarkable troops or knights. Vividly colored military uniforms covered their robust bodies that had yet to age.

Before very long, one person's eyesight accidentally met with mine.

".....?" (Majima)

I felt pressure pointed at me through his gaze. I unintentionally looked back at the man's eyes.

There wasn't a reason for me to be stared at. On the other hand, it wasn't to evaluate me either. Despite that, there was a curious zeal in his gaze.

I wonder what this is. It wasn't affiliated with evil intent in any way. And yet, it somehow felt more severe than mere good intentions. Emotions that hadn't been pointed towards me during my life were included in that gaze.

.....It was uncomfortable. I turned my line of sight away from him.

I realized it when I looked around again.

The rest of the men were the same. When they look at the other students as well as me, their gazes were filled with a curious passion. It was like turning towards devout belief in a religious painting or picture or something.....

What was stranger was that even though such a gaze was pointed towards them, the other students didn't seem to think anything of it except for us.

They were extremely relaxed, exchanging words with their friends next to them. Nobody was aware of the questioning gazes that were occasionally appearing and disappearing.....it shouldn't be like that. Despite this, they didn't seem to mind it.

Upon noticing it, the sensation of being『out of sync』that I had forgotten until just now, had seized my body from the tips of my feet again.

“You seem to have gathered.” (???)

It seems we were judged as having come in suitable time. An elderly man, who was one of the people from this parallel world, called out to everyone gathered in the room.

“I am called Jaylash Green, and I'm the person who is responsible for this fortress.” (Jaylash)

He appeared to be the number one senior most person in this fortress.

He bowed deeply and put his hand on his chest. I opened my eyes wide in astonishment. He must have a high social status, and the man also had a lot of months and years piled up on top of us, but he was displaying the highest respect to us who were several years younger.

It seemed he wasn't merely being polite, it could be guessed from his tone of voice. In the man's voice, there was slight tension and intoxication, and an unmistakable feeling of respect.

“Welcome to our Fort Tilia, 『Heroes who descended from another world』-sama. I am honored to meet you.” (Jaylash)

.....what was that?

What I had just thought was my honest impression.

My thoughts had completely stopped, no thoughts came to mind except for that frank thought. I was staring in blank amazement at the man as a result, and the man raised his head which had been lowered for a long time.

“If it was as usual, you would have been invited to the imperial capital normally, as it’s a custom to be given hospitality by His Majesty personally, but at any rate, this fortress appears to be within this thick forest. Please give me your forgiveness for being able to do nothing but this crude hospitality.”
(Jaylash)

“Don’t be, since we had our request accepted and granted. We are, for sure, very thankful that you are helping rescue our friends. If we have everyone’s help, I believe that we will be able to safely reunite with everyone for sure.”
(???)

A large-built man from the ‘Scouting Corps’, Juumonji, opened his mouth and responded to the man’s words.

There wasn’t a thing to be scared about with Juumonji’s unreserved manner that informed of his gratitude. Even as he was floating a smile on his fearless face, he seemed to accept the respect from the man in front of his eyes as a natural thing, to the extent where he even appeared bigger than his large build.

He looked like one of those main characters from stories, extolled in legends as men of courage... his behavior was just like a『Hero』.

What a farce. Each and everyone of them may have been fooled, but I was able to avoid it instinctively.

We weren’t heroes. We were nothing, but worthless teenage brats found anywhere who had been caught up in an unexpected event like a transportation to a parallel world.

With all the events since we had come to this parallel world, we should’ve realized such an obvious truth.

Have you forgotten the mayhem and the shameful scene on the day the colony collapsed? That helplessness, that wretchedness; you shouldn’t be viewing this as a dream like being a hero if that was remembered.

It should be like that, but even then. It seemed that only I was thinking of such things.

The students who had come along up to this place had been protected by the Order of Knights, they were looking at this farce in front of their eyes without thinking of any problems with this. There was even aspiration remaining in their gazes, and their facial expressions had the look of admiration.

I didn't understand.

My mind was shaken by a gnawing discomfort as if, other than the people from this world, an alien had slipped into our midst.

It seems that the only one who felt something out of place from this situation, except for me, was only Lily who was next to me——

“Worthless.” (Mikihiko)

——well then, it wasn't that.

“.....Mikihiko?” (Majima)

As it was a really small mutter, it shouldn't have been heard except by me who was nearby.

However, he had surely said that. More than anything, the cold gaze he viewed the situation in the room with from behind his glasses, had eloquently told me the true feelings of my friend. Mikihiko's eyes reflected my figure being confused.

“That's good, Takahiro is normal.” (Mikihiko)

With his lips abruptly opening, Mikihiko had said that.

“The meal is about to begin, so we should chat a little. Come with me.”
(Mikihiko)

Part 3

I had a misunderstanding up till now, which was cleared as Mikihiko explained. Teleportation of people was a well-known thing in this parallel world.

“Close to 1,000 people were teleported even though it only consisted of people from our school. Doesn’t that seem strange?” (Mikihiko)

Those were Mikihiko’s remarks, but it was a plausible argument now that he had mentioned it.

However, there was an oddity in our case, as an incident in which this many people were teleported hadn’t happened until now.

On an average of every 100 years, people would be teleported to this world. Be that as it may, the fact that drifting people had crossed over to this world is no different from our case. The number of people appearing on one occasion is usually one person. You could say that the number of people that would appear could be counted on a single hand. It is said that people teleported have outstanding strength.

Without a doubt, the residents of this parallel world knew of our cheat abilities and wanted to maintain the ‘Scouting Corps’ who had gone towards the east; they had thought about and noticed the value of using them. As a matter of fact, it’s said they were aware of the usefulness of the teleported people from another world since the beginning.No. To keep saying『usefulness』, in this case, it isn’t an accurate expression.

There’s no reason to heavily use us because we’re useful. The parallel world residents are harboring us teleported people, and their sense of respect has gone beyond just honor. The proposal of『Heroes who descended from another world』, for this reason, was from their manner of humbling themselves.

If you thought about it again, this wasn’t that strange. The residents of this parallel world were being exposed to the threat of monsters.

People had appeared with abilities that were beyond common sense in such a world. They had displayed powerful strength and dispersed the threat with a single blow. If you asked, they said they were visitors from another world.

I see. They would be treated as saviors. It would be strange if it wasn’t like that.

If you asked, the first descent of the heroes is celebrated among legends. It seemed the human society of this world was on the verge of being crushed by

monsters.

If left free, the threat of monsters would proceed to increase year by year. For the last thousand years or so, due to the descent of the『Heroes』in a cycle said to be once in roughly one hundred years, the monster's influence had been reduced, and the human beings of this world were able to calmly breath.

In other words, the existence of the『Heroes』in this world, was a part of the system for maintaining the world.

Naturally, the world has a system prepared to accept it and there was a way to understand this concept in the common sense of this world.[c](#)

“Didn’t you think it was odd? After all, in our world, there are thousands of different languages. Even in this world, there are at least quite a few unique language systems. If it were originally, we shouldn’t be able to understand words.” (Mikihiko)

“Now that you mention it.....” (Majima)

I recalled the letter that was collected from the remains of the soldiers who had become ghouls. Inside that, the language written down appeared to be something of another world.

Given that I had previously watched the spectacle of the protected students talking to the knights like normal, I didn’t feel anything up until now. However, it was a weird argument that words are understood.

“The language of this world is different from our world. However, it’s a roundabout story to teach the heroes about the language temporarily as well. On the other hand, because they don’t know which region on the planet the transported people will turn up, to prepare for the visit of the heroes once every one hundred years, it’s difficult for the people of this world to learn the language of Earth. In this, however, I think Takahiro can understand it properly.” (Mikihiko)

Mikihiko laughed at the conclusion while just making it seem like a joke, and I knit my eyebrows.

“.....you’re not to blame, I’m not good at listening.” (Majima)

“Haha. Even like that Takahiro, you are at peace of mind. Because in this world, around here is being cleared by magic.” (Mikihiko)^D

There seems to be that sort of magic technology. If said in easy to understand terms, it is a translation skill.

There are materials that easily accumulate magical power in this world, and the technique was developed to create『magic stones』by engraving a magic square directly onto it. For example, the lighting furnished in the room I was guided to, the mountain hut’s barrier and the like were made using that technique.

“.....However, whether they are called magic stones or not, they are surprisingly beta.” (Mikihiko)^E

“Yup. There are parts where that can’t be helped.” (Majima)

According to what Mikihiko is talking about, this translation skill seems to be『picking out words that seem to be best recognized by us』. Therefore, when listening to the same conversation, it seems that occasionally words would be heard differently by different people.

If something like magic and magical abilities existed, instead of using『the individual skill of magicians』in one way or another, they would attempt to『possibly implement skills that could be used by everyone』, and it would be possible to say it was a natural thing for the human society. Thus, the concept of『magic stone』came into picture and they were established as tools to make life convenient.

If we assumed, because『Hero』came up in the conversation from earlier, it seemed we should have thought about it choosing the words that were seemingly best for us. The feeling of it being beta, it’s because it is such a widely shared concept.

But, the translation skill was a convenient thing.

Nevertheless, there was the argument that『You don’t say』surrounding this. My cheat ability was something like『sending my intention to monsters by a magic link called a path』.

This translation skill is that type. But, it was seemingly difficult to manage even though it was useful, and it doesn't appear to be useful unless one undergoes special training.

“Since there are a lot of people similar to Silane-san here in Fort Tilia, I think you can feel at ease and won't be troubled with language problems while you are here.” (Mikihiko)

What he meant in other words, was that『if for some reason you stop and depart from this place, it would become a struggle to have trouble with the language barrier all at once』.

Depending on the developments from here on, it might be necessary to work out a counter-plan.

In any case, heavy treatment is given to the transported people as heroes from this world.

For the residents of the parallel world, we were heroes.

However, because whether they had that in mind isn't necessary, it's still another story.

We were nothing but children moving about in confusion which were released into this parallel world. We were just『victims』spanning the world, it was impossible to be mistaken for something like『heroes』.

If you knew about what happened on the day of the colony's collapse, you wouldn't even dream about becoming a hero

That was just my opinion of it.....however, that was about it.

For example, if you don't know what happened on that day, how would that change things?

The colony's collapse and the accompanying misfortune suddenly changed my sense of values. If they didn't personally experience that change, wouldn't that become a completely different story?

That was the cause of the discrepancy that I felt here.

“Listen, Takahiro. The 3 people from the ‘Scouting Corps’, those people participated in the 1st expedition. They know the truth of the colony's collapse.

However, only we truly know about it. We saw that reality, but they didn't feel the type of atmosphere in that place." (Mikihiko)

It wasn't something you could convey it with words, listening to what happened a hundred times wouldn't do justice to what really happened on that day

They don't know what the reality of what happened at the colony was. That's why Juumonji, the 'Scouting Corps' member from some time ago, said the naive exclamation of "if there was assistance from the people of this fortress, he was confident they would undoubtedly be able to reunite with the others safely".

Under such assumptions, Mikihiko said he examined and thought about the way the 'Scouting Corps' had followed up until now.

"After arriving to this world, they woke up to unrivalled abilities and protected their helpless schoolmates by dispersing the attacking monsters. By fighting these beasts, they crossed through the forest. For them with such skills, the monsters were nothing but small fries. They pushed through the untrodden territory with strength above the norm, finally arrived to a society where people dwelled, and were praised extravagantly as great people similar to heroes." (Mikihiko)

Mikihiko's words were laced with mockery and satire, but what he was saying wasn't incorrect.

Agony, fear, hopelessness, and frustration.

There wasn't even the existence of fragments of the suffering of various things I had experienced since I had come to this parallel world in them.

Of course, they should have been uneasy. However, it was to the degree of having prepared for the consequence of getting over that and encouraging everybody, but if compared to very miserably and helplessly wandering about in the forest alone, it was nothing. It was the spice to color such a heroic tale. Only later, only magnificent efforts will let them shine.....

"Even though the fantasy transfer to the parallel world was the same, the genre every story is different." (Mikihiko)

In a manner of speaking exceedingly typical of himself, Mikihiko expressed that.

And then, on the topic of saying its genre division, Mikihiko pointed out that the side characters were the ‘Scouting Corps’ members, not us.^{[6](#)}

“Accommodating the colony was a mouthful, it was huge. Although temporary, it was a village that one thousand people lived in. Takahiro came here together with them some time ago, but everybody taken out by the ‘Scouting Corps’ members had previously suffered, they had been taking refuge in the mountain huts.” (Mikihiko)

I had heard a story that was similar.

It was the same as Kato-san’s.

After she had run about trying to escape the collapsing colony, she was protected by Miho Mizushima’s childhood friend Takaya Jun, and I heard they were taken along to a mountain hut.

If there were people like me who cheated death without being protected unlike Kato-san, it appeared that there were also fortunate people who were protected without even seeing that hell.

“So, whether or not.....” (Majima)

Along the journey until I came to this fortress, I remembered the state of the students who had been protected.

The atmosphere was peaceful. Warm remarks were hung. The students encouraged each other. Student’s tried to maintain peace. Bullying others was seen negatively. It was like the sight of a classroom anywhere in modern day Japan.

.....that was unnatural to begin with. In addition to being thrown into such a world, for them to not have changed, there must have been reasons.

It was caused by them being continuously protected. From immediately after the transfer, through the colony’s collapse, until they had arrived at the fortress and moved through the fortress, it was constant.

If I thought about it, when they were attacked by the Green Caterpillar just

outside of the fortress, it would be natural for the students to fall into a panic. It was their first time that they had encountered a crisis drawing near to themselves.

And then, they were saved again. By the hands of the ‘Scouting Corps’ members.

In that case for them, the ‘Scouting Corps’ members have always protected them continuously until now. There wasn’t any room to think of questions by seeing the reaction of the residents of the parallel world. It was only us thinking we were being recognized as heroes.

No. It wasn’t only that.

“The transported people, without exception, had powerful abilities we call cheats. It is, however, called『grace』in this world. That is, seeing that we are the transported students from the ‘Stay Behind’ group, there’s no exception.”
(Mikihiko)

It was something I knew about by becoming aware of my ability already, but the students of the ‘Stay Behind’ group, they came to know about the ability they have hidden within themselves right now.

If it is so, as for the heroes of the ‘Scouting Corps’ to them, it’s possible to say they can overtake the leaders.

They have that sort of style anyway. To strongly think so because they yearn for it, it wasn’t by any means an unnatural thing.

“Indeed, a joke speech! What even is a hero!” (Mikihiko)

Whether or not his emotions simmered inside while he spoke, Mikihiko tightly clenched his fist.

His anger was strongly tinted with righteous indignation.

Precisely because I know the tragedy of the colony, precisely because I really felt in my body the importance of losing my life there, I wasn’t pleased by the students being glad insolently because they were being praised extravagantly like heroes without knowing anything.

I understand your feelings. To the extent that it was painful.

But, on the other hand, I couldn't get too familiar and show my feelings on my face like Mikihiko.

—That's good, Takahiro is『normal』.

Some time ago, Mikihiko, having seen me have doubts about the『strange atmosphere』in this place, spoke this remark.

However, I wonder which one of us is really『normal』. What is『strange』, or is it who. I started to think around that, and I became tense and was unable to move.

Part 4

“Ah.” (Mikihiko)

Mikihiko raised his voice and finished the one-way conversation.

Within the room the party, naturally, was in full swing. In the party that made the 3 ‘Scouting Corps’ members the leading actors, exactly, two people were entering.

Both of them were female, but it was clear they weren't servers from the military uniforms they had on.

“Leader!” (Mikihiko)

With Mikihiko having raised his voice, the two women that arrived noticed us.

Mikihiko went and rushed over to the woman with a solidly built physique and high stature with shortly cut silver hair walking in front,. She appeared to be the leader of the Third Order of the Alliance of Knights. The scene of Mikihiko, who was short, rushing over to the tall women, it gave the impression of a dog running over to its owner for some reason.

Surprisingly he seemed to be emotionally attached to them. It wouldn't be strange if he considered the woman to him as what Lily was to me.

I watched attentively while thinking the like, and the figure of a girl with blue eyes and blonde hair entered my eyesight while revealing herself from behind

the woman.....and I became flabbergasted.

“An Elf?” (Majima)

Through the gaps of her long hair that was somewhat curled, large ears with pointed tips were sticking out. Those characteristics, they were very similar to elves in well-known manga and games.

Parallel worlds are all the same. It isn't humans that are called normal——there seems to be『people』which aren't homo-sapiens. If that is like that, I wonder if there would be the existence of races such as hobbits and dwarfs.....

She giggled, and the female elf which seemed to be approximately the same age as me says.

“You, everyone, they have the same reaction when seeing me.” (Elf-san)

That smile was something that couldn't help but attract my eyes. If you looked at her, her looks were extremely well-featured for a young woman. Her loveliness was reserved, like a field of flowers with only one flower if an example was used, and it was compatible with her honesty like a soldier amongst girls.

However, other than her facial expression charming me, my attention was caught on another thing.

“.....perhaps, you are Silane-san?” (Majima)

“Yes. This is the first time I'm showing my face to Takahiro-dono.” (Elf-san->Silane)

While we were in the forest, her body was covered in white armor the entire time, so I hadn't noticed because she was wearing a helmet. However, the voice of the woman nodding her head seemed to be hers; surely even when they were coming to this fortress, there wasn't any discrepancies with her exchanged words.

“Please excuse my impoliteness for having not shown my face so far.” (Silane)

She lowered her head in addition to tightening her heels. Such behavior, it was exaggerated exactly like up until now.

With complicated feelings, I looked down at the golden hair on the back of her head.

“Please raise your head. It isn’t something that needs an apology like that. Besides, I’m not such an important person.” (Majima)

“What are you saying? You are one of the heroes from the other world. Besides, aren’t you someone who travelled on foot through that sea of trees?” (Silane)

Before, I didn’t mind that pompous manner of speech, but now I know from where does that attitude stem. That was enough for her humbling herself to make me feel extremely uncomfortable.⁷

However, after all is said and done, Silane’s confidence in the heroes wasn’t wavering.

Her gaze that was hidden in her helmet before, her facial expression; they eloquently indicated her expectation and harbored reliance.

This was already close to religious belief.

And from thinking about it, I realized it.

In actuality, this was religious belief.

It may be easy to understand by saying that we were miracle-working gods of some sort.

There was the existence of magic, and in this parallel world there was the descent of heroes periodically, so legends were living as real people; as there was absolute religious belief towards the heroes that came from another world, we dwelled in the chests of the people who live in this place.

I didn’t know whether everyone in this world was like that. But, at least, in my eyes they had faith in us who were naive. They were risking their lives in battle, and by enduring it, the heroes would appear eventually, and the crisis ended with them fighting alongside each other.

And then, we had descended in that way in this place.

Without doubting that we were the heroes, they offered their help of rescue with no hesitation if they saw we were troubled, and continued to give service

without leaving behind their respect.

I have been concealing my skepticism with my armor underneath my clothes, but they weren't even considering that.

They were foolish to not know anything.

.....well, I wasn't similar to showy people who think like that.

Believing in your neighbors.

Not being suspicious of the malice of another person.

Even though I had continued to live like that before.

Those wonderful things I had completely lost when I came to this world, they still possessed those things.

And, I could say with confidence that it was the same for the rest of the transported people in this place, including the 'Scouting Corps'.

After this, the 'Scouting Corps' would be participating actively as heroes of this world. In that case, with their powerful abilities, doing something like exterminating monsters that were threats to this world, would be easier than exterminating insects. It was paradoxical, as their mighty abilities are to the extent where bravery and the like aren't needed, but they are giving their assurance they would do activities as heroes.

Even though the 'Stay Behind Group' was protected by them, eventually their abilities will wake up, and they must proceed to live as heroes.

Their story differed from the genre and me, as there wasn't the existence of a tragedy in their tales. As there was the preservation of those wonderful things without them even being conscious of it, they continued to live as heroes.^f

This wasn't a bad thing. Since they were probably using their powers for righteousness.

Certainly, I knew things they didn't know.

I knew the greediness of humans from the collapsed colony. I had felt hopelessness. I had the experience of crawling on the ground miserably while smeared in agony.

However, while it may be true I was lambasting the people who believe in other people as naive for『not knowing』, I thought it was slightly different.

It didn't mean that I was openly distrusting strangers. It was only that I couldn't believe them.

I didn't get something from experience, I just lost something of importance as a human being.

They believed in their neighbours, but personally, I completely distrusted them. I didn't think it was significant enough for me to begin asking things such as 'who is decent'.

“Takahiro-dono?” (Silane)

As I was called out to abruptly, I came to my senses.

Silane was watching me intently with a look of anxiety.

“Ah, yes. What is it?” (Majima)

“It's about the matter of us promising a while ago to give you an explanation in various ways, I'm sorry. I hope you won't mind waiting a bit.” (Silane)

I nodded to her statement.

“I don't mind it. Which reminds me, although I saw I was late to participate in the party, is it related to something about that?” (Majima)

“No. That is also another matter. The Green Caterpillar's attack at noon has increasingly been making me feel uneasy. I had continued to watch the state of the forest from the top of the castle wall for a while.” (Silane)

.....I became tense with worry and hoped Gerbera wouldn't be found in the vicinity, because I knew the extent of her carelessness.

Despite this remarkable difference as for just specs, I didn't worry about Rose for the same thing, as I thought it was important because she conducts herself as usual.

If she didn't manage her self-control and came nearby, was detected, and caused an uproar.....it wouldn't end as a joke if it became such a thing. There were three cheat ability users here. I think I'd want them to give up and be

obedient.⁸

Having interpreted my subtle facial expression as anxiety towards the defense of the fortress, Silane said with a smile with her well-regulated features.

“Please have peace of mind. Shamefully, it was from my over-anxiety.”
(Silane)

“Is that so. It’s fine. Really.” (Majima)

“After this, to the people who I had the privilege of accompanying until here, I cannot not return a greeting to them. If it’s alright with you, I still want to have a talk with you after that.” (Silane)

“Indeed, however, I’m sorry, I think I will leave momentarily. Therefore, could you please choose a time in the future still?” (Majima)

“Eh? Takahiro, are you returning to your room?” (Mikihiko)

To Mikihiko who asked, I nodded.

“I am a little tired as I just arrived. Sorry, Mikihiko. I haven’t grasped the area quite yet. Can I rely on you to guide me to my room?” (Majima)

“Okay. What are you going to do, Mizushima-san?” (Mikihiko)

“I, too, will return. I can’t leave Majima-kun alone.” (Lily)

“Okay, roger. So you do have a crush on him. Well then, leader. I will come back again afterwards.” (Mikihiko)

After addressing Silane and the leader, we left immediately.

Until we arrived at the room, I exchanged guileless stories with Mikihiko who had given us guidance. I obtained the outline of the information I wanted, so there wasn’t any questions he would receive from me.

However, Mikihiko appeared to be different.

“Takahiro~” (Mikihiko)

We had finally arrived in front of the room, but Mikihiko began to talk so I wouldn’t bid farewell.

“I think you don’t want to remember it very much, and it’s fine to not answer

if it's unpleasant. Although it is surely something from that day our colony collapsed, is it okay for me to ask one thing?" (Mikihiko)

"What is it?" (Majima)

"You worked in the same area as Masaki and Souji." (Mikihiko)

What Mikihiko was speaking of, it was the names of our common friends.

"Do you know what became of them?" (Mikihiko)

"They died." (Majima)

I had predicted he would ask.

Therefore, I felt I was able to reply with a relatively calm voice.

"They died on that day. Before my own eyes." (Majima)

Beyond that, I wasn't intending to tell the full story.

—One person had been wretchedly knocked about and died.

—The other person was wrapped in flames and turned to ash.

Telling him such a thing wouldn't change anything.

If that's the case, it is better to be silent. I thought so.

"Is that so." (Mikihiko)

Although I intended to tell him as simply as possible, maybe he sensed it by some possibility. Mikihiko didn't continue to ask about them beyond that. But on the other hand, he said.

"It was nice you were alive. Of course, Mizushima-san as well." (Mikihiko)

"Indeed. It's good I could meet you once again as well." (Majima)

I said as Mikihiko left while smiling.

As I saw him off, a sigh spilt from me.

I'm glad to meet you again. Those words I was referring to were true. However, eventually, I decided to keep it a secret from Mikihiko to the end.

Those that have been lost, they will never come back again.

People's lives, connections that weren't two-faced, or possibly, even my

former self.

“Master.....” (Lily)

Lily, who was continuing to hug my arm, whispered close to my ear. Her voice was really trembling with worry somewhere in it. She was worried about me.

I put my arms around her back, and hugged her closely.

“Thank you. However, it’s alright.” (Majima)

“.....truly?” (Lily)

“Truly. It doesn’t mean that I’m pretending to be tough.” (Majima)

I was not jealous.....if I said that, it would become a lie all the same. In actuality, I felt『out of sync』from the Order of Knights and students that showed unconditional confidence that I myself wasn’t able to do, and I was tense from being shocked.

I wasn’t able to live with an air that was like that now. I wasn’t able to enter inside of that circle. The thing that is necessary for that, it won’t come back this way ever again.⁶

However, I didn’t worry about such a thing.

“Since you guys are here for me.” (Majima)

Instead of grieving for things I had completely lost, I thought I should protect the warmth that was in my arms until the end.

Even though it was a secret for that reason, I should be cautious even if it’s to that extent. I was a human being called Takahiro Majima. I would not be ashamed of that.

It’s not that I won’t approve of them living as heroes from now on, and while I may be looked down on, nevertheless I don’t intend to unreasonably deprecate myself.

The same they have their own tale as heroes, I have my very own tale along Lily and the other girls.

It may be that I’m just treating myself harshly when comparing to them, but

this may be the main discovery I made today as a whole.[H](#)

“Shall we go back into the room soon?” (Majima)

I separated from Lily.

“We should arrange a meeting. I was able to understand the general situation. And tomorrow, there are questions that are of no use unless I ask Silane-san various things. Whether or not there are monster users except for me, regarding food provisions, and later.....I have to do something about the problems of words. ” (Majima)

“I am not good at language study.” (Lily)

“Whether you say that or not.....there is hope in mana stones.” (Majima)

I entered into the room with Lily.

And, the door shut with a click.

Translator's Notes

¹ – The last part of the sentence made no sense to me, but the editor changed it a bit.

² – Yeah, I mean, he almost died a couple of times. Of course, he had girls taking care of him afterwards....but other than that, yeeeeep.

³ – This sentence is kind of awkward because of how the sound effect “㇏/kokuri” is a sound effect for nodding.

⁴ – Oh boy, this was a long time ago. For those who need context, the man who was guarding Kato and Miho in the cabin, *before rape happened*, left them in the cabin to go east to find the ‘Scouting Corps’ and ask them for help when the colony collapsed. Kato or Lily, *I can't remember who exactly*, told the MC about this, and that brings us to that detail.

⁵ – MC is 100% right here. I've had to go back and fix a lot of sentences.....

⁶ – I believe he is saying the ‘Scouting Corps’ members are the side characters here, but the end of the sentence might be a bit off as it confused me quite a bit.

~~7 – I don't know if the latter half of the sentence is quite right. Could someone help me with it? Thank you Jorgelotr. ▲~~

8 – I'm detecting an underlying tone of sarcasm here..... ▲

Editor's Notes

A: Oh god I hate this sentence, for whatever reason this series loves making long long long sentences. I tried to split some into parts so they make sense but this one is too confusing even in the raws. Oh well `_ (ヾ) _/` Basically if you didn't get it generally means stuff like when you're so engrossed in a conversation you forget your surrounding and it feels like you're no more in that place. ▲

B: Basically, this one means that the fort was on the edge of the land mankind lived and basically the frontier where they fought against the monsters with the common goal of crushing them. ▲

C: I kinda inferred these from the context, the "raw translation" didn't really make much sense in English. ▲

D: Simplified to everything is solved by magic, basically means that the issue of the language barrier was resolved by magic. ▲

E: The "beta" here doesn't refer to the type of Japanese main characters, it's just a way to say cliché. [Click me for more info.](#) ▲

F: The "wonderful things" he keeps going on and on about is what you could call the "innocence". They're still hopeful and not completely broken like him. He's being way to philosophical but I kinda kept it loyal to the JP text without much editing, since changing it too much would kill the essence. ▲

G: Can this dude stop speaking like a cryptic monster and use a more natural grammar lmao. It's a pity, he's the main character otherwise his speech style makes me cry. ▲

H: Again, he's just using a metaphor here. He does it way too much. ▲

I: I wonder if this has to make sense, but perhaps it doesn't. `_ (ヾ) _/` ▲

-Upsilon

Chapter 17: The Elves' Circumstances

The next morning. Lily and I headed towards the place to eat, guided by a soldier who had come around the time we had finished dressing ourselves.

We were led to a room that was smaller than the one I was guided to yesterday. After exchanging some light greetings with a few of the students that had already begun eating, we headed towards an older woman who was in charge of the waiters.

She served us a dish with a vegetable salad and passed over bread with heat still remaining in the center from it being freshly baked. She served us a bowl of meat soup slumped out of a cauldron and we sat at the table.

When I began to have breakfast face to face with Lily, Mikihiko came over to us.

“Good Morning, Takahiro. Mizushima-san.” (Mikihiko)

“Ah Mikihiko? Good morning.” (Takahiro)

“Good morning, Shumoku-kun.hey~, you’re eating a lot.” (Lily)

Exactly as Lily had stated, the portion of breakfast he had brought and placed on his wooden tray when he sat down on the seat next to me was three times what we were eating.

“You will be served and given more if you ask for it. All you need to do is ask for it, Takahiro?” (Mikihiko)

“I’m okay. I can’t eat so much this early in the morning. Or perhaps I should say that you are a glutton?” (Majima)

“Mhm~. Well, I guess it’s because I went until I was on the verge of starvation once. My constitution seems to have changed somehow.” (Mikihiko)

Having boldly stated that in the tone of the harmless conversation even though that statement would normally startle the surroundings if it was heard, Mikihiko proceeded to cram his bread into his mouth with a *mogyu mogyu~*.

“I am somewhat afraid that I’m getting fat. I must exercise properly.” (Mikihiko)

Although Mikihiko made such a claim, he was considerably thinner than my memory of him. Probably, after his『situation of being on the verge of starving』 as said by the man himself, it seemed he still hadn’t completely recovered.

Whether or not his body was trying to overcompensate for that time, Mikihiko was greedily devouring down his meal.

“Speaking of exercise, what will Takahiro and others do today? Are you planning to participate in the training?” (Mikihiko)

“Training.....?” (Majima)

“Yup. After all, you can send around the personnel from the fortress to ask for the ‘Scouting Corps’.¹ It appears they will provide and assign light training for people who are interested. Fantasy people with swords and magic. They are going as far as to say that “The ‘Stay Behind Group’ have cheat abilities”. Isn’t it just ‘pearls thrown before swine’² with them being unable to be self-aware of what kind of thing it is? Just a little at a time after today, although I am trying to do various things.” (Mikihiko)

“I see. I have understood the story.however, we are taking time for Silane-san.” (Majima)

“Ah~, come to think of it, I heard you mentioning a discussion or something like that.” (Mikihiko)

It appeared that she was coming to our room around the time we finished eating breakfast, as we have an appointment. Although, I still doubt whether or not he had participated as I wasn’t there.

“Does Mikihiko participate in the training?” (Majima)

“Eh? Me?” (Mikihiko)

As I asked while gazing down at the two one-sided daggers hanging at his waist, Mikihiko looked around at the other students that were in the room with a fleeting sidelong glance, then snorted his nose with a *humph*.

At his easy to understand behavior, I wryly smiled a little.

I didn't feel that Mikihiko's attitude was to blame. To be honest, I wasn't fond of the 'Scouting Corps', nor did I harbour a very good impression of the other students.

It was merely trifling jealousy. I realized that. Nevertheless, there were also things that couldn't be helped even when you knew of them. Humans were detestable and little in my experience.

"I plan to go to Captain-san's room today." (Mikihiko)

Mikihiko swallowed the food that was in his mouth with a *gulp* and opened his mouth.

"Or perhaps I should say these days, although it is also today." (Mikihiko)

".....you were surprisingly charmed by her." (Majima)

I recalled the silver-haired woman I had met last night. And, also the appearance of the emotionally attached Mikihiko.

"It's nice to fall in love, huh. It's to the point in various meanings." (Mikihiko)

Mikihiko wasn't even embarrassed. He was pleasantly shaking his shoulders.

It appeared this was serious in some way or another.

".....I'm surprised. You... didn't you say that you had no interest in romance with the exception of 2D³ or something like that?" (Majima)

"It was something serious enough that it changed my religion. Well, there are some considerable difficulties, however. Even birthplace, or rather, how should I put it, things like the difference of worlds and the age difference aside, I should say the greater challenge is to overcome the difference in social status." (Mikihiko)

"Social status?" (Majima)

"That person, it appears she is a princess of a small country." (Mikihiko)

"Why is she acting like the leader of the Order of Knights with such a social status?" (Majima)

"There are various things. Various things. Such things as ties of obligation, it

contains all kinds of things, right.” (Mikihiko)

If asked, the country itself, called the『Alliance』, which appointed her as the leader of the Third Order of the Knight Alliance, was originally said to be a collection of small countries that faced the sea of trees.

The Third Order of the Knight Alliance was composed of knights that were dispatched from the countries among them, so that’s why people of the royal status are acting as the leaders commanding them. With a feeling that the parallel world’s situation seemed to be really troublesome, I thought that I didn’t want to have anything to do with it if circumstances allowed it as much as possible.

However, Mikihiko said without particularly appearing to get worked up.

“She is also that person, because of various difficulties, huh. I think I want to give her my support.” (Mikihiko)

Mikihiko seemed prepared to tackle the complicated circumstances of the people of this world which appeared to be troublesome from right in front somehow or another.

I didn’t think I was unable to understand why he was particularly poking his head into trouble like that.

For some reason or another, I felt like I understood Mikihiko’s current feelings.

Personally, whatever circumstances in the future that would become evident after this, stuff like being separated from Lily was unimaginable. Undoubtedly, it was the same for him.

For example, if I had come across a human of this other world instead of a monster which was Lily.

Or, if it was the opposite of that.

Our situation might be different.

“.....do your best.” (Majima)

“Ah.” (Mikihiko)

I was able to be that sort of friend, a person that at least sends words of encouragement. Mikihiko smiled like he was little embarrassed, and nodded in return.

“.....n?” (Majima)

I tilted my head as I noticed Lily, who was facing me while alternating her gazes towards us.

Since she was improving her sociability by smiling, her facial expression appeared to be strangely happy. Maybe it’s my imagination.

“What is it?” (Majima)

“No, it’s nothing.” (Lily)

Lily shook her head and returned to her meal.

Maybe it was something she couldn’t say in this place. Or maybe it was truly nothing.⁴well, she would have said it from over there if there was anything important.

I concluded that that was the case and resigned myself to idly chatting with Mikihiko for rest of the meal.

Mikihiko’s conversation was partly about the leader’s story, and partly was teasing my relationship with『Miho Mizushima』. The point was, almost everything was completely idle banter, and there was no important information to gain.

Nevertheless, things like chatting with friends were normal.

Lily didn’t actively participate much in the conversation though she gazed at us while we conversed.

With a good mood for some reason, she was attentively watching us.

Having finished the breakfast, we left the room.

Mikihiko said he would take us to our room, but I was in the process of understanding the internal structure slowly, so I declined with the thought that it wasn’t a problem as long as I returned to the room.

Lining up shoulder-to-shoulder with Lily, I returned straight to the room.

If you expressed the interior of this fortress we were staying at very roughly, it was in a shape similar to a flat, many-sided pillar with 3 levels piled on top. We were staying in the third lowest division.

We noticed that some of the knights were also living here, and even when we were returning back to the room, we passed some pleasant-looking knights several times. They stopped and thanked us for our courtesy each time, which made me completely fed up. There didn't particularly seem to be a building for the soldiers to stay and sleep in, but it was salvation we didn't have the opportunity to meet except for the soldiers who were being bodyguards and the host.

The tumult reached my ears when we climbed the stairs and came along to the floor our room was on.

There were signs of someone disputing.

Although we were sorry for the trouble, we couldn't return to our room without passing through this place.

"Now then! Annoying!" (Sakagami)

As we came forth from the corridor, a blonde-haired male student with a strong impression within the students who were being protected, Sakagami Gyouta, was coming this way with his shoulders squared up.

"Move!" (Sakagami)

Even though the dispute became troublesome, we obediently cleared out of the way.

Sakagami passed by immediately. He clicked his tongue and he glared as he passed by us, whether or not it was because he didn't mind or because my companion was a woman.

It was an amusing atmosphere even though we were entangled into it, Sakagami proceeded to leave without saying anything.

The 3 people from the 'Scouting Corps' were in the corridor.

And, one person was a boy sitting on his backside with a swollen cheek.

They were with Sakagami along the way to this place, he seemed to be timid『bullied child』.

“Really, fellows like him.” (Juumonji)

Said Juumonji of the ‘Scouting Corps’ with a look of resentment and his arms folded.

In the meanwhile, Watanabe, another male member of the ‘Scouting Corps’, was making the male student who fell on his backside recover while her other hand held a battle staff.

“Are you okay?” (Watanabe)

His actions were unexpectedly reassuring. Although she was close to a wizard from what I saw, Watanabe’s physical ability in itself seemed to be a『Warrior』 which excelled at magical and physical abilities.

Watanabe healed the male student’s injuries by applying recovery magic, and then spoke words of advice.

“You had better not get near that guy too much. Also from our side, since I will warn you properly in advance.” (Watanabe)

“.....yes. Thank you.” (Student)

The male student bowed his head to Watanabe’s remark, and then turned back.

A dark facial expression. We passed by one another.

While nonchalantly looking over his shoulder and seeing them off, his small figure chased after Sakagami and disappeared into the staircase. The words of the ‘Scouting Corps’ appeared to have not reached him.

“It’s a troublesome thing. Don’t you think so?” (Juumonji)

Looking over my shoulder, Juumonji who had noticed us came to speak to me.

“Even though now is the time we must cooperate, it is troublesome to get their cooperation due to their views still being based on our former world.” (Juumonji)

It appeared that the ‘Scouting Corps’ guys seemed to be troubled by them.

Although they produced charisma and obtained tremendous strength, it wasn't so simple to 'unify people'.

"By the way, where are you guys going at such a time?" (Juumonji)

Juumonji asked us as he had noticed.

"Haven't you heard the talk that everyone in the chivalric order of knights are giving and assigning training when the meal finished?" (Juumonji)

"We aren't participating in the training." (Majima)

With my reply, Juumonji who had enquired appeared to be surprised.

"Is it bad for your physical condition?" (Juumonji)

"I didn't mean it like that." (Majima)

"If that's the case, what for?" (Juumonji)

Juumonji's tone of voice sounded similar to criticism.

I see. I understand.

Since he had said it in such a tone, the time Mikihiko talked about this matter, so this was the reason he seemed to be pouting like that.

It was troublesome because he was talking with a positive-mindset basis rashly. It appears he didn't mean to have any ill-intent by any means.....

It looked good to completely terminate the conversation quickly in this situation.

"Sorry, but I somewhat have an arrangement. As it is like that, we will be going." (Majima)

I began to walk while taking Lily. Juumonji was grimacing, but I pretended to not see it.

"Ah, wait just a minute." (Yuna)

Nevertheless, she waited in the place I was trying to pass by on the edge of the three people of the 'Scouting Corps'.

"Sorry, Juumonji-kun, Watanabe-kun. It's just a little minor business. Can you go ahead?" (Yuna)

Saying so, the lone woman of the 'Scouting Corps' three people, it was the『Great Runner』Eno Yuna.

Whether or not this was unexpected for him as well, Juumonji nodded with a face that omitted maliciousness.

"Ah, yes. I understand. Don't you be late. Since you won't have time to eat your meal." (Juumonji)

"There isn't a phrase saying 'I'll be late', Juumonji-kun." (Yuna)

Said Yuna jokingly, the two men that had accompanied her proceeded to leave before, and she stood ahead of Lily.

It appeared that she had things to do, Lily's way.....it appeared to be towards『Miho Mizushima』which was being mimicked by her.

"It's been a while, Mizushima-san. Although we haven't talked very much, do you remember me?" (Yuna)

"Of course. After I arrived here, I never talked to you, huh." (Lily)

Eno was a sophomore, while Miho Mizushima and I were in the same year of school.

I hadn't exchanged words with Eno, and even though I recognized her face as a classmates', I didn't particularly remember her name.

However, Miho Mizushima and her female companions, even though they weren't friends that were particularly intimate, it appeared that there was still was enough sentiment to have an opportunity to exchange words.

I understood that she had called to us to halt for the sake of greeting her acquaintance, Miho Mizushima, especially, but I immediately noticed something strange in that situation.

Eno appeared to be paying an undue amount of attention to me instead. She was turning fleeting glances towards me.

"Yuu~p, it's pitiable." (Yuna)

.....It was something that was said as a contemptible greeting.

I wondered whether or not she was picking a fight. I had no intentions of

provoking her feelings.

On that point, Sakagami from some time ago was imposing. I didn't, by any means, feel like fighting those guys in the 'Scouting Corps'. Unless Lily and others are revealed by their hands, however.

"Ah, no no. It isn't your matter." (Yuna)

Eno buzzed and shook her hands, then returned her gaze towards Lily.

"You're acquainted with Takaya Jun-kun, right? One below?" (Yuna)

Lily opened her eyes widely to Eno's words. I was the same as well.

That was Miho Mizushima's childhood friend, it was the full name of the boy who was a member of the 'Scouting Corps'.

"Takaya-kun is alive. Just in case, I completely thought I needed to convey it to you or something like that." (Yuna)

"That matter, he reported the information about the colony's collapse to the 'Scouting Corps' as I thought....." (Lily)

"Yup. Takaya-kun did it." (Yuna)

Mizu Mizushima's childhood friend went towards the east to request rescue from the 'Scouting Corps', I had heard it from Kato-san before. It appeared he had accomplished his goal.

.....no. He hadn't accomplished his goal. Because Miho Mizushima wasn't in this world anymore. Even if he had finally arrived at the base of the 'Scouting Corps', there wasn't even any meaning to it.

"Since I knew Mizushima-san's face, Takaya requested me while lamenting to protect you. Concerning the result, I didn't even have to go rescue you." (Yuna)

".....what is he doing now?" (Lily)

"He was left behind in Ebenus, the east fortress. Coming out of the sea of trees by himself, it's similar to being unreasonable of course. In addition, because his body was worn-out with his forced march. Although he grumbled splendidly, it didn't seem that he could come along with us. I thi~nk it will take some time for him to arrive here." (Yuna)

While saying that, Eno looked towards my direction with a fleeting glance again.

“.....Although he'll become pitiable when he arrives. As for me who knows the endurance of that child, I wanted to root for him, but this looks quite bad for his relation, huh.” (Yuna)

By seeing the figure of『Miho Mizushima』standing similarly to cuddling close together with me, it appeared she had guessed our relation. The truth was a little different, but in any case, there was no doubt it was a cruel development for Takaya Jun.

“Well, that's pretty much the 'story from me'. It was nice to have an opportunity to speak before I departed.” (Yuna)

Eno said with a face like a burden was taken off of her shoulders. Lily expressed her gratitude to her.

“Thanks a lot, Eno-san. What was the 'departure' by the way?” (Lily)

“Hm? Mizushima-san doesn't know? Because it's said we will put out the second team of 'Scouting Corps' even before the day is over, it has been decided we will accompany them. Around the mountain hut, and later, we intend to visit the colony if we have time.” (Yuna)

That was the story I had also heard from Mikihiko.

The departure was soon after Silane had returned, as one would expect from the『Great Runner』. She was quick.

“Ah, but have peace of mind. Because it's no good for everyone who remained in the fortress to have anxiety, it has been arranged so Juumonji-kun and Watanabe-kun remain.” (Yuna)

“It doesn't mean that everyone in the 'Scouting Corps' goes, huh.” (Lily)

“Because I alone am plenty for war potential. Rather, I alone am on the quick side, but.....it was completely opposed by the chivalric order of knights 'because I don't know what is in the sea of trees'. Even someone like Juumonji-kun, and also Watanabe-kun were rejected to be taken because they were loud.” (Yuna)

With Eno's demeanor of shrugging her shoulders, I couldn't perceive something similar to crisis awareness particularly directed towards going towards a dangerous place after this.

That wasn't needed.

I had seen it yesterday— —or perhaps I should say, I remembered the battle with the Green Caterpillar『I wasn't able to see』. There were no lies in her two names of『Great Runner』, the combat ability of Eno Yuna was overwhelming if said in a single word. She was a beauty despite all that. It was certainly a point such as 'they must be heroes'.

It was around thus, they were reflected as reliable in the eyes of the people of the parallel world and the 'Stay Behind Group', but she was reflected as a scope he was unable to stomach and nothing could be done in Mikihiko's eyes.

"Ah. Not good. Sorry, Mizushima-san. I have to go soon." (Yuna)

Whether or not she noticed was locked deep into talking, she said so and turned back.

"Well then, see you later." (Yuna)

Eno started to run while waving her hand. It wasn't a speed that wasn't reflected in my eyes, but it was a manner of walking that was possible to say she was a good walker nonetheless.

That retreating figure proceeded to vanish in the other side of the corridor in the blink of an eye.

Silane turned up shortly after we had returned to the room.

"Good morning. Takahiro-dono, Miho-dono." (Silane)

Lily ushered in Silane who was bowing her head and had arranged her heels tightly. This area was the same as yesterday when Mikihiko was the other party.

"I'm sorry for having come in the morning. Today I'm not an armoured figure, huh." (Silane)

Silane was identical to how she was in yesterday's party, she didn't wear her usual armour which seemed to be the standard soldier equipment apart from a

sword on her waist. For some reason or another, there was an image of them being always completely armed because they were knights and soldiers in a fortress, but it appeared there wasn't such a thing.

"The duty of us knights is to suppress the monsters which are pushing through the forest. Preservation of the fortress, controlling, and defense are next to professional duties of the army's soldiers." (Silane)

It appeared that military service was compartmentalized into the Army Corps and the Chivalric Order of Knights. It wasn't significant enough to require remembering things like the over compartmentalized bureaucracy of our world, deciding the territory mutually as an organization seemed to be a matter of course to avoid useless conflict.

"Because it was a long-term mission, especially for me, the releasing of arms was approved." (Silane)

"Were you off-duty? I'm sorry about that." (Majima)

"Please do not mind. Although one might say day off, it's inside of a forest where there's nothing to do other than training. Moreover, it is a great honor to be useful to the hero-samas like this." (Silane)

".....well, please enter since we are standing around talking." (Majima)

"Excuse me." (Silane)

Silane who walked into the room as I said so, and she was leading a little girl.

The same blue eyes and blonde hair as Silane. Since the gaps of her hair were rather short, pointed ears were peeking through. I wondered about whether or not she was 12 or 13 years old yet. It looked to me like she'd become a beautiful woman similar to Silane in the future, but she was still marked as a child now.

She was wearing not soldier's equipment, but a simple dress appearance. She held a small basket in front of her body.

"Her name is called Kei. She is helping with my everyday necessities." (Silane)

"K-, Kei is how I'm called. Pl-, please treat me well." (Kei)

Kei hung her head while she looked to be nervously shivering. Her white

cheeks were blushing.

There were chairs and desks in the room, but unfortunately there were only two chairs. I sat side by side with Lily who was sitting on the bed, and offered the chairs for the two people who were guests.

“Silane-san and others, by all means please sit on the chairs.” (Majima)

“No. We will remain as is.” (Silane)

Placing herself a little distance away, Silane took a posture of standing at attention. Behind her, the little girl named Kei also stiffened up vertically.

“.....Um, Silane-san.” (Majima)

I got a wrinkle in the space between my eyebrows by mistake.

“What is it?” (Silane)

“Can’t you be at ease a little?” (Majima)

While talking, I didn’t believe my disposition could be calm while the other party continuously stood.

If I had to be specific it was difficult to talk. My real intention was to ask what kind of harassment this was.

“Please sit. After, can’t you also quit exaggerating talking so much? Silane-san’s age surely won’t change thus. Please act your usual way somehow or another.” (Majima)

“I’m unable to do that.” (Silane)

It was an immediate reply.

“Takahiro-dono, to people of the lower class like us, we think it is the equivalent of being too polite too much.” (Silane)

Rather, as for Silane, it appeared there was a place she thought about my behavior.

“Please call me Silane somehow or another. Honorifics aren’t needed.” (Silane)

“.....if I’m not mistaken, I remember Mikihiko was using honorifics with

leader.” (Majima)

“Because leader is a senior as she’s older than you. In Mikihiko’s story, it was valuable among other things to pay respects to elders in Takahiro-dono’s world. I think it’s wonderful.” (Silane)

It seemed that Mikihiko seemed to have explained away to leader while saying things on the spot.

That story was typical of him, it was difficult for me to do the same.

Unlike Mikihiko, I was self-aware that I wasn’t very good at speaking skillfully. I found it hard to even when trying to persuade someone wondering in what way could I answer back? It didn’t skillfully come to mind on the spur of the moment.

Although I exchanged looks with Lily, she returned a bitter smile. She appeared to have given up hope.

Whether or not this couldn’t be helped.....as I resigned to my fate, I noticed that Silane’s fine appearance was frowning.

Her blue eyes were continuing to stare at my eyes. Her thin lips spun words.

“Your face was seriously unpleasant, Takahiro-dono.” (Silane)

“.....Did it appear on my face?” (Takahiro)

I was astonished at the fact it was pointed out. I hadn’t intended to reveal it in my facial expression.

“It isn’t noticed normally. It’s because we elves are sensitive to the subtleties of emotions.” (Silane)

Said Silane who mixed in a bitter laugh. Even from the fact that the childish Kei is all shook up behind her, I understood that the unpleasantness I felt was transmitted to them.

“Inside some of the hero-samas, there were some saying similar things to Takahiro-dono just now to us, but there wasn’t people who were thinking unpleasantly and seriously like Takahiro-dono.” (Silane)

Silane’s tone was transparent with bewilderment.

Then for them, it is a common thing to come into contact with the heroes with a respectful attitude, and they wouldn't even expect them to reject it.

Even if it was just me, I was self-aware it was somewhat oversensitive.

I had felt unpleasantness in their respectful behavior, because there were psychologically unpleasant feelings concerned with being treated as heroes. If that didn't exist, it might not have been as far as discomfort even with being bothered.

Although Mikihiko seemed to have felt the same way about Silane's attitude, that guy had better points than me. It seemed Silane didn't recognize it or something, but for this reason, it's certain he displayed eloquent persuasion in the leader's direction who he was charmed by.

".....understood." (Silane)

After Silane showed signs of pondering it a little, she nodded once.

"Even I don't want to make unpleasant thoughts in Takahiro-dono by any means. Let's think of it as receiving and taking you at your word here." (Silane)

As Silane bowed while saying so, she crossed the room and sat down on the chair.

Behind her, while peeking at our appearances, the childish Kei followed. Her face was bright red now because she seemed to have overwhelming nervousness was circulating in her eyes, perhaps Silane may follow a part of my words in consideration of her.

Silane sat in a proper posture while straightening up her back upright, and opened her mouth while waiting for her attendant, Kei, to sit.

"Let's act in accordance with Takahiro-dono's feelings as much as we can. But on the other hand of saying that, I want to get Takahiro-dono to stop using honorifics." (Silane)

"Understood. Silane also may talk in her usual way." (Majima)

"I am sorry, but this tone is au naturel." (Silane)

Even though she said that, the useless exaggerated places in Silane's polite tone had disappeared. It was careless he had his innermost thoughts seen

through, but as a result it turned out all right in the end.

When it became easier to do, I decided to accomplish the goal which I had called Silane to the room for.

“Well then, I want to hear the story immediately.” (Majima)

“I understand. The story you wanted to hear, if I’m not mistaken, was concerning the legend of the hero-samas?” (Silane)

“Yeah. Could I get the story?” (Majima)

Honestly, the importance of the world’s hero legend itself appearing inside of me, it wasn’t very high.

I didn’t say I had no interest, but if I had to say it then, my aim of getting clues of the story I really wanted to listen to here was strong.

“Let’s speak in that case. Originally, the first descent of the hero-samas——” (Silane)

And the story Silane told, the general framework didn’t change from the story I heard from Mikihiko yesterday.

The parallel world’s people were driven into a wall by the monsters, and the heroes descended every one hundred years in that place. It was fifty years or so depending on the situation, and there were also periods of time over one hundred years, but the heroes continued to arrive in this place without interruption.

Assuming we are excluded, the legends of the heroes which were enumerated by decades of successive generations, all of them were records of combat against the monsters.

And, that also was the history of mankind’s conflict in the sea of trees.

“If it is apart from the undead lineage, fundamentally the creatures are thought to have originated in the sea of trees. The forest which we designate as the sea of trees, it is known to be tinged with thick magical power. Then when the first hero appeared, the power in the sea of trees increased because it mostly covers the land we live in now, is being preached.” (Silane)

The sea of trees was expanding. Humans were being roused by the continuously attacking monsters.

The first hero descended there.

Among the legends Silane talked about, the people who were leading the heroes shaved off the sea of trees little by little. A colony was born in that, and it grew into a country before long.

“The sea of trees is dismembered in various places, and speaking of the current sea of trees, especially in the middle of the continent, we refer to where we are as the vast forest.” (Silane)

After talking about the legend, Silane also touched upon the current sea of trees.

“The deeper in the sea of trees is, the more overflowing thick magical power there is, and it is known that powerful monsters live there. As a result, it becomes difficult for people to merely walk in by foot further into the interior. So, a given name was assigned by a standard of『to what extent were people able to walk in by foot』. That is, the『Outer Layer』, the『Deep Part』, and the『Extreme Depths』.” (Silane)

Several fortresses were constructed in the outer layer of the sea of trees.

Fortress Ebenus was in the east and this place was Fortress Tilia. Although there were many rampant monsters, it seemed it could be said it was barely an area of humans until this place.

In contrast with this, there wasn't the existence of a fortress in the deep part of the sea of trees. It was because there were enough powerful monsters running rampant that they weren't able to send laborers to construct a fortress.

This place was hell as it wasn't known whether or not even the most elite knights were able to return home, but by installing a barrier stone of protection while paying heavy sacrifices, it was barely dotted with mountain huts as advancement bases.

Finally, the extreme depths.

The extreme depths part of the sea of trees was made up of more than half of

the entire area of the sea of trees even now, and almost no humans entered it. As there weren't the existences of mountain huts prepared with barrier stones, the collective areas where it mostly wasn't known how many monsters there were was designated as the extreme depths.

If I tried to remember, after we became comrades with Gerbera, we travelled north while searching for human habitation, the lineup of monsters we encountered changed. Along with that, I remembered battles gradually seemed to become easier.

Even though one of the reasons would be Lily and others' cooperation becoming better, perhaps the great change was also from the weaker monsters inhabiting the shallow places of the forest.

By the way, the place the colony was constructed which derived from our transfer, it lied in the depths near the outer layer of the northern sea of trees.

When Mikihiko heard of that, it appeared he had shouted 'What kind of bullshit is that!'.

If you considered it to be something like transferring into the vicinity of the Demon Lord's castle immediately following the start of a game, you would be able to understand the thing he wanted to say.

Be that as it may, it seemed to be better that we transferred into the extreme depths. Even if we had cheats comparable to the scale of three hundred people, we didn't know what was going on.

In actuality, among the heroic tales of the heroes which Silane talked about, there were several scenes where the heroes who were challenging the extreme depths for the sake of defending humanity died in battle grandly in exchange for heavy military gains.^{[5](#)}

Taking into consideration heroic tales were almost equal to legends in this world, and deducting the part where they were magnificently dramatized, it was a failed expedition any way you thought about it, it was the overwhelming defeat of the heroes.

As proof of that, it seemed a strategy similar to the army using the heroes as an emblem to whittle down the sea of trees without taking a break hasn't been

conducted in these last five hundred years.

There were demons which wouldn't easily come near the heroes in the extreme depths of the sea of trees.

Did mankind not have a way to do something against the extreme depths of the sea of trees in that situation?

Of course, there wasn't such a thing.

The magical power held by the sea of trees is proportionate to the depth of the forest. In other words, by cutting every tree in the outer layer, if the sea of trees itself became smaller, the area of the extreme depths and nature also become smaller.

Except for one or twice in the extreme depth expeditions, the successive generations of the heroes basically wielded their mighty abilities in the deep part or the outer layer of the sea of trees, or, they went and subjugated the monsters which appeared outside of the sea of trees.

By doing thus, they had helped the residents of this world by clearing the forest.

At the end of the story of the heroes who descended one hundred years ago and died about fifty years ago, Silane finished talking about the legend.

"Thank you, Silane. It will be of use as a reference." (Majima)

Although there were also parts with detailed omitted, I was able to roughly know only the part related to the history of the heroes in this world.

The meaning of knowing whether or not how long the existence of the heroes in this world was big, it was valuable time.

"However, Silane knew the legend of the heroes very well." (Majima)

I thought that after I finished listening to the story from start to end, as it wasn't like she was a scholar, but she knew the story well.

In other words, that meant she had received some form of education.

"Even in this world, are there schools still?" (Majima)

"There are, but I did not attend one. However, in most villages there are

churches constructed of the Temple Church, and children were raised while being taught about the legends of hero-samas.” (Silane)

The Temple Church which Silane said, it seemed to be a『religious organization which worshiped the heroes as substitutes for miracle-working gods』from only hearing the story.

The impression I felt when I watched the parallel world’s people, it became something which was almost completely right on the money.

At the time the heroes descended, they beared the duty of supporting the heroes’ actions. They had the original war potential called the ‘Temple Chivalric Order’ for that reason, as that name had also appeared inside the legend many times.

It appeared the heroes usually fought alongside them. Because the ‘Scouting Corps’ were in the sea of trees while prioritizing rescuing the survivors now, they hadn’t linked up with those who were in the distant Imperial Capital yet.

Another duty of the Temple Church was to teach the posterity the heroes’ exploits.

If the things Silane said were true, it had been decided the religious faith of the heroes would permeate into this world considerably widely.

“It’s even a big deal. — Did Kei also hear the story from the church?”
(Majima)

The other party I asked, it was Silane’s female companion who had sunk into silence since some time ago.

Her soft and full face was red similar to an apple, and she had been worried about something the whole time from some time ago.

She appeared to have been holding her breath for a while, and I thought she looked like she would collapse at any time. I waved a conversation because I thought it was okay if she loosened her nervousness even a little. However, this might have been counterproductive.

“Fue!?” (Kei)

Whether or not she hadn’t thought I would wave the conversation, Fei

jumped up as she sat with a *flinch*.

The basket she had placed on her lap jumped high, and it narrowly fell before she held it with both hands. The sound of her heart which was playing a ‘baku-baku’ seemed to be heard.

“Y-, yeyeye-, yes. Um.....that.....” (Fei)

As I only heard a reply that didn’t establish any significance because it was incoherent, it seemed I didn’t even know whether or not she was speaking of something no matter how hard I tried. She was too nervous whatever the circumstances may be.

“Please calm down, Kei.” (Silane)

Silane who saw that vomited a sigh, and held her hand to her forehead.

“I’m sorry, Takahiro-dono. My companion has shown disgraceful behavior.....” (Silane)

“No. I don’t particularly mind.” (Majima)

It may be beneficial to not speak untactfully. Kei seemed like she would burst when she talked to me. As she was going as far as that somehow, I was absolutely sorry that she was uncomfortable like that among other things.

“.....Ahh, come to think of it, Takahiro-dono also said he was interested in magic technology.” (Silane)

Whether or not she did that to sweep away the difficult atmosphere, Silane suddenly changed the topic.

Silane exchanged looks with Kei. It seemed they weren’t able to come to a mutual understanding for a moment, so Silane urged ‘the things she brought’, and Kei opened the basket she was holding in both arms above her lap in a state of panic.

There was some cloth laid, and there were gems with various sizes, shapes, and colors on top of it.

“These here are magic stones.” (Silane)

“Did you expressly bring them for me?” (Majima)

I certainly had said I wanted to hear the story beforehand, but it appeared she brought the actual thing.

“Can I hold them in my hands?” (Majima)

“By all means.” (Silane)

I picked up a palm-sized blue stone.

A complex pattern was engraved onto its smooth surface. I wondered if this was something applied to magic squares when using magic.

When she watched me take a good look, Silane gave an explanation.

“There are various kinds of magic stones. It is enabled by passing any magical power into it. What Takahiro-dono is looking at, it is something which had the water attribute of magic thoroughly engraved on it. It doesn’t only reproduce magic, there are also tools which use that. Key, show them.” (Silane)

“Y-, yes.” (Kei)

Kei transferred the cloth which was spread out to the table with trembling hands. Below that, there were several tools stored.

“That container?” (Majima)

“It’s a water bottle. There are water attribute magic stones stocked in the bottom. It will fill up with water when you pour in magical power.” (Silane)

“And the bag here? The one that appears to have many small mana stones attached to it?” (Majima)

“That one is a tool bag. And its effect is to preserve goods and its size is increased.” (Silane)

“.....And this fingertip-sized cylinder?” (Majima)

“It’s a lighter. Fire comes out of it.” (Silane)

There were various convenient goods lined up. Honestly, I was surprised.

It seemed that the country’s technology was more advanced than I thought it would be.

Because they used magic, there were several things impossible to reproduce

even with the present-day technology we had in Japan.

Although there was also something like a translating machine if I thought about it, it may not be possible to say that the technology of either worlds were high unconditionally.

“Have these goods which use magic stones spread?” (Majima)

“According to people these are also used by common people. Of course, there are also rare items which are expensive. There were also some production lines which established simple attribute magic, but they couldn’t carve it without being a special artisan if the effect was special, and in the first place, there were also things that required high purity ores.” (Silane)

“On that subject, is there a story saying the manufacturing method for things like barrier stones is lost?” (Majima)⁶

“The rest, there were also things that couldn’t be used from the start unless one received special training.” (Silane)

“Can everyone use this?” (Majima)

When I asked while indicating the magic stone on top of the cloth, Silane nodded.

“Anyone can use the water attribute magic stone and illumination. Because originally, magic stones were developed for the sake of people who couldn’t use magic.” (Silane)

“Didn’t you say there were also things that could be used without training? That is, for example, is there a magic stone of translation or something like that?” (Majima)

“Did you know? Would you like to see it?” (Silane)

Saying so, Silane sent her hand around to the back of her neck. And, she took out a thin chain with a red mana stone the size of a fingertip attached to the end from the chest area of her military uniform. This seemed to be a mana stone of translation.

“It’s surprisingly tiny.” (Majima)

“Although it is only effective if it is at a certain distance, it was from the

assumption it would be carried around as a standard. By the way, this costs a fortune although it is tiny. This was loaned at the time we commenced the rescue mission of the hero-samas.” (Silane)

If we assumed so, it appeared to be hard to get. No. It wasn’t meaningful when you obtained it if it wasn’t useful.

“There was a story which said training for the sake of using them was necessary, but what other magic stones are different?” (Majima)

“Other than recreating magic, the nuance of auxiliary tools which control one part of the magic are strong. Therefore, it isn’t different from learning magic mostly. Time and talent are needed.” (Silane)

“I see. So that’s the reason.” (Majima)

“Since it was fundamentally thought we would become retainers of the hero-samas, we thought it wouldn’t be necessary to commit it to memory.” (Silane)

If it was normal, it would be like that.

However, as a person who wanted to take another line of motion, that was extremely inconvenient.

It was a headache-inducing part, but it may be suspicious if I hang onto it too much.

When it was known I was considering leaving this place, I would be troubled when they asked for what reason I was leaving. It would be best to leave it here.

“No. Thank you. I was a little interested.” (Majima)

When I thanked her, Silane put the magic stone on top of her hand back in her chest.

I don’t mean that I saw something that was wrong to see, but it also would be impolite to stare too much. I averted my gaze.

Thereupon, something yellow in my vision flickered.

“Come to think of it...” (Majima)

While I was taking the opportunity, I tried to ask another thing.

“Even the thing floating next to Silane, was it made with magic technology?”
(Majima)

It was something that had been on my mind the whole time.

In the area above Silane’s shoulder, there was a mysterious sphere-shaped object floating which was shining yellow even now. It was similar to kneaded clay which had been rolled into a ball, and it was revolving on its own even now.

It didn’t exist in our world, and because it was something which had the obvious aura of magic, it obviously would be the product of magic technology of a parallel world. As it was lit up in the vicinity like that, I tried to ask because it was an opportune chance.

However, Kei who was sitting next to Silane gave a voice similar to astonishment to this.

“Eh? Takahiro-dono, you see the spirit?Ah!” (Kei)

After she said it to the end, it appears she herself realized she blurted out a question without even thinking.

Her face which was red from the beginning flushed to the point it couldn’t be any more red than this. Looking at both of her hands which were grasping the tops of her knees, Kei hid her face.

Silane floated a wry smile when she saw her like that, and turned her eyes towards the perplexed me.

“I see this child in Takahiro-dono.” (Silane)

“What Kei said, what does that mean?” (Majima)

“This child is an existence referred to as a『Spirit』.” (Silane)

Silane held out her hand while saying that, and the faintly shining yellow clay work——spirit approached with a *fuyofuyo*.

The short arm of the spirit touched the young woman’s fingertip.

No. Was she not touching it? In my eyes, their fingers appeared to be slightly caving in. It appeared the spirit wasn’t a substance.

“Being exact, it is called a『Small Spirit』. It isn’t something which can be seen

without having a special sense which is referred to as『Spirit Eyes』. Us elves have this sense from birth, but the humans able to see it are only a small fraction even among people who excel at magic. By any chance, Takahiro-dono, do you have knowledge of handling magical power?” (Silane)

“That is.....” (Majima)

Damn it, I thought about it too late.

By no means had I considered it was something which wasn't seen by normal people. It seemed I had asked something carelessly.

“I.....er, a little.” (Majima)

As I was just about to deny it immediately, I changed my mind just before, and I admitted I could use magical power.

If the minimum condition was to have the so-called spirit eyes or handling magical power, the person who instead denied it would be the problem here.

My handling of magical power wasn't at a great level. It wouldn't become a problem to that extent even with it being known. Rather, if it was known I was trying to conceal it poorly, they may notice I was concealing my cheat when I was loose from there. I decided that was foolish.

“I learned it when I was in the colony, and self-taught afterwards.” (Majima)

“I see. Understood. Takahiro-dono was able to survive in the sea of trees, there was a reason around that, huh.” (Silane)

While I didn't say anything, Silane convinced herself. I didn't deny it as it was convenient.

“Although I say that, don't misunderstand because I don't mean that I'm able to anything considerable. I can't use magic. I'm only able to strengthen my body's abilities. And that level isn't much either.” (Majima)

Supplementing the misunderstanding so it didn't go too far, I looked up at the spirit which was floating.

“However, there are things such as spirits.” (Majima)

“It's said that spirits are things filled with magical power which have assumed

a shape in the world. A contract with the spirits is a special magic which is can be handled only by us elves. When you contract with a specific spirit, we will be able to borrow strength from them. People who have such an ability are designated as spirit users. Incidentally, when our chivalric order of knights was resting, this child was the one to inform me that Takahiro-dono was hiding.”
(Silane)

“What? Then it wasn’t Silane herself who noticed me?” (Majima)

“Elves’ senses are more superior than other people’s, but I couldn’t notice as you were hidden within that deep forest still. Because the distance was too far to sense your presence. It also might be different for the ‘Scouting Corps’.”
(Silane)

Silane floated a bittersweet smile with her mouth.

“It was at that time this child informed me『There is a person watching us』.”
(Silane)

Come to think of it, before the green caterpillar attacked just before arriving at the fortress, for a moment, Silane turned her gaze towards the spirit which was floating in the sky.

At that time, this meant she received a warning.

“Spirits don’t recognize the world with their sense of sight.” (Silane)

Silane drew back her hand which was stretched out to the small spirit.

“One theory is that they perceive the world with magical power. As they are like that, it could find Takahiro-dono and others who were hidden even within that forest. Of course, I had asked it in advance to『inform me if there was a being hidden and watching us』as a countermeasure for monsters.” (Silane)

“..... I see, that’s amazing.” (Majima)

“Although I said so, they only warned in accordance with being asked, so caution is required with that part. Because I don’t mean that we are able to mutually understand and chat freely with the spirit as the other party, I cannot deny there is an inflexible point in the long run. No. Of course, there is the problem of them being next to us spirit users and not the spirits travelling with

us, but there is no mistake that spirits are good neighbors to us.” (Silane)⁷

While I was injecting sounds to indicate I understood to Silane who was cheerfully talking in some respects about the spirit, I restrained my cheek which was twitching.

It was because I became I aware I had crossed over quite a dangerous bridge.

It was said the spirits didn’t perceive the world with their sense of sight.

So that means, when I first met Silane, and that Rose and others parted from us and left, wouldn’t that small spirit have accurately recognized those?

No. On the contrary, Asarina who was on my left hand now, and the matter of Ayame being hidden within Lily’s body, wouldn’t it be aware of them?

Since she hadn’t asked, it hadn’t conveyed it to Silane who was its master.

Even now the spirit was absent-mindedly wandering around.

From their faces which had 2 dots for eyes, it seemed I wasn’t pulling out a response related to my doubt.

“To the spirits, are you a spirit user?” (Majima)

Although I was a little scared, it couldn’t be helped even with me overly being worried.

I changed my mind. It’s because it was also a good time in order to ask something I wanted to hear.

“That’s right, Silane. There is something that has been on my mind just a little.” (Majima)

“What would that be?” (Silane)

“It appears there are spirit users who employ spirits, but in this world, is there no existence similar to a『Monster User』which enslaves monsters?” (Majima)

This was something I couldn’t help but absolutely ask.

In accordance with what I know, my cheat ability is to『lead monsters』.

If a technique system similar to being able to be a『Monster User』in this world didn’t exist, for example, it was possible a situation like being mistaken for an

ordinary monster just as I entered the town for the sake of food supply and receiving attacks would occur.

On the contrary, if there was the existence of monster users in this world, for example, it would become unnecessary to hide my ability. Be that as it may, Lily was useful as a hidden card, and depending on the situation even Gerbera and Rose could be invited to this fortress and they would be able to enter into the outlook.

At least, people with the ability to enslave monsters didn't turn up inside of the legend of the heroes which I had heard today. Of course, the brave himself was within the parallel world's people who fought as their colleagues.

Be that as it may, my expectation value was low, but there was a possibility it was also there. I couldn't go and not ask.

"In our world.....although it is a story inside of nothing more than a literary creation, something called a『person who has the ability to be accompanied by monsters』turned up." (Majima)

While pretending to be stubbornly curious, I asked Silane.

"There is the skill to handle spirits, and if they are spirit users, wouldn't there also be a technique to enslave monsters similarly....." (Majima)

"It's different!" (Kei)

Suddenly, my words were interrupted, and my eyes went round.

It was Kei who had curled herself up with nervousness so far.

She was standing up. At that time, her hands bumped into the table, and a few of the mana stones rolled onto the floor. However, she argued vehemently without being concerned about that.

"Spirits are different from things like monsters! They're different! So, please don't misunderstand!" (Kei)

Her threatening attitude was hard to believe from her quietness so far.

I was completely taken aback. I didn't know what had made her frantic.

Kei's current face had become deep red with nervousness and a different

emotion.

It wasn't anger. Rather, this facial expression looked like something of a child on the verge of bursting into tears.

"Please understand, Takahiro-dono! We.....we aren't traitors or something like that!" (Kei)

"Kei!" (Silane)

With a strong voice that appeared to stretch her cheeks, Silane called out Kei's name.

".....ah." (Kei)

It seemed Kei also came to her senses because of that.

Her red expression became white like paper in a twinkle.

It seemed she herself noticed the reality—she had completely shouted at one of the heroes.

"I-....." (Kei)

Kei sat on her knees on the floor in order to throw out her body.

".....I-, I'm very sorry!" (Kei)

She lowered her head very deeply and apologized.

I didn't know her exact age, but from her appearance, a 10 year old or so girl was prostrating herself before my eyes.

Rather, this was a punishment game for me.

".....I don't particularly mind. Because I'm not angry, raise your head."
(Majima)

But even with saying that, Kei didn't move her head which was pressed against the floor. Her small shoulders were trembling.

"Please say something as well, Silane." (Majima)

I turned the floodwaters towards Silane and sought assistance from her.

".....Takahiro-dono has said thus. Kei. Please sit on your seat. You must not bother Takahiro-dono." (Silane)

With Silane's remark, Kei timidly raised her head.

She slowly returned to the chair. She appeared to be just like a prisoner who was given a death sentence.

Seeing her like this, Silane lowered her head very deeply this way with a poor expression as well.

"I'm sorry, Takahiro-dono." (Silane)

.....You as well?

No. In this world, this appeared to be normal. Since I was regarded as a member of the heroes.

"Concerning punishment, because I will accept any method, please have forgiveness about Kei's rudeness." (Silane)

"El-, elder sister Silane-sama!?" (Kei)

".....so, I don't mind it." (Majima)

I breathed a sigh as I was fed up with it.

Although I intended to understand it yesterday, I was sick of the exaggeration of being treated as a hero. Were we not able to even have a flat-out conversation?

"Please raise your head as I asked, Silane. And, I would appreciate you giving me an explanation of the situation if it's okay." (Majima)

"Yes." (Silane)

When I requested for an explanation of the situation, Silane finally raised her head.

Feeling relieved, I asked once more.

"And, what does this mean, Silane. I cannot grasp the situation at all."
(Majima)

"That is, um....." (Silane)

Not making herself quite clear wasn't typical of Silane. It appeared it wasn't something she wanted to talk about much.

However, it was a hopeless setting if I didn't cut into it here. It became this just as I talked about monster users. It was impossible to stop hearing detailed accounts from them.

"She blurted out something like『we weren't traitors or something like that』."
(Silane)

It made no progress even when I waited. I decided to cut and carry off this from here.

"Have there been times when you two were treated as traitors?" (Majima)

"I don't mean it was the both of us, but....." (Silane)

Replied Silane while she took the place of who had completely contracted, but there wasn't another point. I spoke while going back to my memory again.

"You certainly said『Spirits were different from monsters』. By any chance, was the reason『Spirits appeared to be the same as monsters』because you were treated as traitors? In other words, it was the race called elves itself which appeared one after another and the spirit users who were traitors.....?"
(Majima)

Silane didn't reply. Silent as is, she averted her eyes from me.

This was the right answer.

"However, why is it like that.....?" (Majima)

".....Takahiro-dono might not get it because he came from a parallel world where there wasn't the existence of monsters, but the threat of monsters is the biggest threat in our world." (Silane)

Whether or not she accepted it, Silane turned her face towards this way.

Whether or not she strengthened her resolve, she regained her usual dignified appearance.

"It's a story of the remote past. The spirit being employed to the spirit user is a special characteristic of us, and there was a period which said that they were the same as monsters. Kei said it was different some time ago, but we also can't say it is different. However, we just know that spirits aren't things that cause harm to us....." (Silane)

In reality, since monsters were living things which possessed magical power, it appeared spirits wouldn't be different from shapes formed with magical power.

Perhaps, it might be the same thing.

"A person which handles monsters. They are a traitor of mankind. An inner opponent which slipped in for the sake of destroying mankind.Of course, there are no people who say such things publically now. However, it is a historical fact there was a period in which us elves were persecuted like that, and, unfortunately, our social status even now isn't called something high."
(Silane)

In short, would it have been called racial discrimination?

.....no. If we assume the story was past tense, it was strange how Kei reacted with oversensitivity to that extent.

Regardless of it being tangible and intangible even now, it would be a proper point to think the discrimination remains.

If I tried to ask about the circumstances, there were also parts which came to mind.

For example, until I received an explanation from Silane, I hadn't known of the existences of spirit users. And just before that, it was in spite of hearing from start to end the legend of the heroes of the successive generations.

Because elves which were spirit users hadn't appeared even once in the magnificent heroic tales, I didn't know that existence.

"I understand the story." (Majima)

When I spoke, Kei trembled.

Even in the eyes of Silane who was next to her, there was a look of panic of being stifled to death.

The feeling of being fed up inside of me increased its weight even more.

No matter how hard I may try, for this, they won't understand unless I say it firmly.

"Saying it once more, I'm not particularly angry." (Majima)

I stared straight into Silane's eyes and spoke.

Silane also stared back into mine. Her blue eyes searched the inside of my eyes.

Before long, just the strength of Silane's shoulders escaped them.

A look of bashfulness appeared on Silane's well-regulated features immediately after that.

Some time ago, Silane said『Elves were sensitive to another person's emotions』. Silane observed my attitude, and as she confirmed what I was saying was my true feelings, I was relieved at last.

Her emotion of bashfulness after that, it would be her feeling ashamed from surmising my words. Such an upright attitude of her was something desirable for me.

I will repeat my words again.

“I also understand about your reaction from some time ago. If there was a reason like that, it's also natural to become desperate like that. Me saying something insensible without knowing it was bad.” (Majima)

The last part was said to Kei who was becoming smaller.

As Kei heard the sound, she shook her head vigorously.

“Su-, such a thing. It was definitely because I said something rude to Takahiro-sama.....” (Kei)

“I said not to worry about it. If it is true you are worrying about it, please stop calling me『Takahiro-sama』instead. That one is the part I'm quite uneasy about.” (Majima)

Kei's face appeared to be troubled. I realized she understood but truly disliked it.

“We-, well then, what do I call you?” (Kei)

“It's fine with『attaching a '-san'』like usual. If you like, I don't mind even if you address me without an honorific.

“Th-, that is still.....Ta-, Takahiro-san?” (Kei)

“That’s fine.” (Takahiro)

I nodded, and Kei clumsily smiled broadly at last. After I had met her, this was the first time I had seen her smile.

For now, Silane and the others would be fine with this.

The problem was my side.

My feelings had become greatly perplexed. When I came to this fortress, it was a story saying ‘how many viewpoints are there’.

There seemed to be no other monster users in this world.

Because of spirits being treated as monsters, and considering elves having the ability of being a spirit user became discriminated against racially, my existence which led monsters would be completely out.

It was the worst case as I had assumed.

I had concealed my cheat ability just to be sure and it was the correct choice. Further from this, it was absolutely impossible for my abilities to be known.

There was also the possibility of receiving different treatment from the elves because I was a hero in this world. However, I also wouldn’t go and act based on wishful thinking.

“Majima-kun.” (Lily)

“Yup?” (Majima)

As I was pondering, Lily called out to me and I came to my senses.

If I looked, Silane and others were a little bored.

“Aah. My bad. I was doing nothing for a little bit.” (Majima)

“If you are tired, I think we should leave soon. Is there something else you are up to the task to chat about?” (Silane)

“Because I’m not particularly tired, it’s fine to not worry about that. That’s right, besides that.....” (Majima)

I think I heard the things I wanted to hear. Was there something else besides that?

Lily took out a lifeboat to me who was enclosed in his thoughts.

“Look, those rings. It’s just the right time, let’s hand them over to Silane-san.”
(Lily)

“Aah, that? That’s right, let’s give them now.” (Majima)

I stood up from the bed.

When I went toward the backpack which had been placed in the corner of the room, I fetched a few rings which were tied with a cord and bundled from the inside of it.

These had been collected from the corpses of the knights which had become ghouls.

Because the necessity for my original goal of 『Raising the favorable impression at the time of first contact』had disappeared because we were accepted by the parallel world’s people more smoothly than I thought, I forgot to take them out so far.

It had been confirmed Silane was wearing a similar ring. However, it was differently colored. Because her equipment was supposed to be the same, would it be a different force or something? At any rate, the proper treatment was expected to be done if it was her.

When I handed over the rings, Silane opened her eyes with an appearance of being severely astonished.

“These are things of our Third Order of the Knight Alliance. What place were these?” (Silane)

“I discovered corpses when I was wandering about within the sea of trees. Because the corpses couldn’t be brought as one would expect, I thought to at least do the articles of the dead.

“.....so it was something like that. Thank you very much.” (Silane)

Silane painfully frowned.

“That is, perhaps, when we received a request to rescue the ‘Scouting Corps’ in the sea of trees, a detached force would have gone first as a herald for the sake of guaranteeing the safety of the hero-samas. They went to clean up

monsters on the route. They met with a bad experience going to a group of monsters unfortunately, and I heard they were annihilated. Among them, I heard there were some people's bodies who weren't able to be recovered.....”
(Silane)

Silane stared at the ring on top of her hand while hanging her head in shame a little, it appeared she was pondering something.

“Takahiro-dono. I have a request.” (Silane)

Several seconds passed, and Silane raised her face.

“Can I get you to participate in their funeral?” (Silane)

Translator's Notes

¹ – *Wow, these guys are practically slaves for the “heroes”.....* ▲

² – An old saying essentially meaning: “valuable things given to people who do not appreciate them”. ▲

³ – Of course he was. ▲

⁴ – Or maybe, she was happy you had a friend. *Stahp being dense.* ▲

⁵ – Congratulations, you threw away your life for gains you can't even spend anymore. *slow clapping* ▲

⁶ – I don't quite know what ‘失伝’ meant in this sentence. ‘結界石なんかは製法が失伝しているって話だったか’ ▲

⁷ – The middle part of the last sentence is a bit iffy, but it confused both me and someone else in my discord who knows Japanese. ‘もちろん、それは精霊たちがどうこうではなく、わたしたち精霊使い側の問題で、我々にとって精霊がよき隣人であることは間違いのないことなのですが’ ▲